

“My final words of advice to you are educate, agitate and organize; have faith in yourself. With justice on our side, I do not see how we can lose our battle. The battle to me is a matter of joy. The battle is in the fullest sense spiritual. There is nothing material or social in it. For ours is a battle not for wealth or for power. It is a battle for freedom. It is a battle for the reclamation of the human personality.”

*Dr. B.R. Ambedkar*

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#### AMBEDKAR MISSION INC.

is a charitable institution registered under the Ontario Corporation Act.  
Its main objectives are:

To propagate the religious and social philosophy of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, in that all human beings should be treated as equal regardless of social, economic, political, or religious background.

To promote the study and practice of the Buddha Dhamma according to the book *Buddha and His Dhamma*, written by Dr. Ambedkar, along with other schools of Buddhism.

To promote social justice, peace and human understanding.

To promote multiculturalism in Canada.

To support, aid and cooperate with all such organizations or individuals who are working for similar objectives.

Ambedkar Mission apprises various world forums, through literature and personal representation, about the social and economic condition of those “lowly” people who are despised and discriminated against, particularly in India.

## One Hundred Years For Freedom

1891-1991



Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar

1891 – 1956

*Commemorating the Champion  
of India's Oppressed*

Edited by Members and Friends  
of the Ambedkar Mission of Canada

Ambedkar Mission, Inc.

Toronto, Canada

1991

# Publisher's Postscript, 2009

The life and work of Dr. Ambedkar provide many valuable lessons for today's Buddhists – both in terms of illustrating how committed social action can be embraced within the Buddhist tradition and in terms of shining a beacon on Buddhist practice in a country where many people erroneously think Buddhism disappeared hundreds of years ago.

This book, a celebration on the centennial of Ambedkar's birth, was originally published by The Ambedkar Mission of Canada as the final issue of their bi-annual magazine, which was ceasing publication. "One Hundred Years for Freedom" was created in 1990 and published in 1991. The original book was distributed at no cost.

I was one of its editors, the designer of the book, and production manager for both the typesetting and printing of the final version.



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We feel this is in keeping with the original intent of the Ambedkar Mission Canada, and of those kind individuals and organizations who gave permission for their writings and photographs to be included in the book.

The Sumeru Press is committed to maintaining a repository of documents pertinent to the history of Buddhism in Canada, for the benefit of practitioners and future historians. The new technologies of portable document formats and the internet have combined in a way that makes this possible as never before.

Consequently, Sumeru has established a Buddhist Ephemera Project, of which this is the inaugural item. We invite inquiries from holders of relevant material with regard to including these in our archive, so that they can be available to the public at large.

*Karma Yönten Gyatso*

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Cover: Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar.  
Opera Studio, Datta Mandirawar  
*Courtesy of Prof. Eleanor Zelliot*

# ONE HUNDRED YEARS FOR FREEDOM

1891–1991

Commemorating the Birth Centenary  
of Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar,  
Champion of India's Oppressed

Edited by  
Members and Friends  
of the  
Ambedkar Mission  
of Canada

## Preface

In this volume we honor the birth centenary of Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar—social and religious reformer, statesman, scholar, educator, humanitarian. Born one of India's socially despised Untouchables, Ambedkar became a powerful voice calling for a radically new society. During a lifetime of teaching India's oppressed how to work toward their own liberation, Ambedkar campaigned for democratic government and the rights of workers and women, formed political parties and reform societies, founded night schools and colleges. An outspoken and influential spokesman during the long negotiations and conflicts that led to the creation of independent India, he went on to become a member of the committee that drafted the Indian Constitution. Near the end of a life of exploring the meaning of religion and philosophy, Ambedkar became a Buddhist and was joined by hundreds of thousands of his supporters. This momentous step reestablished Buddhism in the land of its origin, and contributed revitalizing currents in the international Buddhist community.

We also take this opportunity to rededicate ourselves to continuing Dr. Ambedkar's mission of service to India's oppressed and neglected. Change in modern India has brought new crises as well as progress, new suffering as well as hope. Untouchables, numbering more than 100 million, face a rising tide of arson, murder, and rape as they try to use the rights that are now legally theirs. Women of all castes struggle to change dehumanizing traditions. Young children from poor families leave school to work long hours for little pay. The unity of the nation is challenged by armed conflict among ethnic and religious groups and between the few who have wealth and the many who are poor. Human rights have become a casualty of political conflict.

Conditions in India have dictated our choice of words in this book. Legally, the practice of untouchability is abolished, but because discrimination against people born into these hereditary castes continues, all of the writers whose works appear in this book use the term "Untouchable" to emphasize this social reality. Some of these writers also use the word "Dalit" (*the oppressed*), a term developed by Untouchables to express pride in their struggle and to show support for other suffering communities.

We wish to thank the many people who have contributed the articles, photographs, time, funds and expertise that have made this commemorative volume possible. Together, we express our hope for a brighter future for India.

# 1. REMEMBERING AMBEDKAR

*There are by now tens of thousands of people whose own lives have been touched in some way by Dr. Ambedkar. Each of us carries a slightly different picture of this great man's life, work and vision. We introduce Dr. Ambedkar here through the words of Sangharakshita, a leading figure in the international Buddhist movement. The following article forms a chapter in Bhikshu Sangharakshita's book, Ambedkar and Buddhism (Glasgow, U.K.; Windhorse Publications, 1986).*

## The Significance of Ambedkar

*Bhikshu Sangharakshita (1986)*

In the grounds of the parliament building in Delhi stands a statue of a stout, elderly man clad in a business suit and wearing spectacles. The statue is about fifteen feet high, and stands with right foot slightly advanced on the square top of a pedestal of much the same height. Underneath the left arm of the statue is a large book, while its right arm is outstretched practically to its full extent, index finger pointing in the direction of the parliament building. The statue represents Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, Law Minister of the Government of India from 1947 to 1951; the book underneath his arm is the Indian Constitution, and his finger points to the parliament building because it was there that in 1948 he presented his draft Constitution to the Constituent Assembly, there that it was accepted a year later, and there that the legislation based on its provisions has ever since been passed.

Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar was one of the most remarkable men of his time, and the story of his life is the story of how exceptional talent and outstanding force of character succeeded in overcoming some of the most formidable obstacles that an unjust and oppressive society has ever placed in the way of the individual. Born in Mhow in central India in 1891, he was the fourteenth child of parents who belonged to the very lowest stratum of Hindu society. According to orthodox Hindu tradition, he was not entitled to receive education or to acquire property, he could engage only in the most menial and degrading work, and he could not come into physical contact with members of the higher castes. In short, Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar was born an outcaste or Untouchable. He was expected to wear

cast-off clothes, to eat the leavings of his higher caste masters, to be humble and obedient, and to accept his lot as the well-deserved punishment for sins committed in a former existence.

Fortunately for him, however, his father had served in the Indian Army and there acquired a certain amount of formal education in both Marathi and English. This enabled him to teach his children, especially Bhimrao Ramji, and to encourage them in their own pursuit of knowledge. In 1908 the young Ambedkar passed the matriculation examination of Bombay University, and so uncommon was such an achievement on the part of an Untouchable boy that the event was celebrated with a public meeting. Four years later he graduated from the same university with Politics and Economics as subjects and soon afterwards entered the service of the Baroda State, the ruler of which had awarded him a scholarship. At this point his father died (his mother had died when he was five) and four months later the bereaved son left India to continue his studies at Columbia University (USA) on a further scholarship from the same liberal-minded ruler. Though he had climbed higher of academic achievement than any other Untouchable, Ambedkar was far from being satisfied. Convinced as he was that knowledge is power, he knew that without that power in full measure he had little hope of breaking the bonds that millions of Untouchables in a state of virtual slavery — and how strong those bonds were his own bitter personal experience had already taught him.

From 1913 to 1917, and again from 1920 to 1923, Ambedkar was in the West, and when at the age of thirty-two he finally returned to the country of his birth it was as one of the most highly qualified men in public life. During his three years at Columbia University he studied Economics, Sociology, History, Philosophy, Anthropology, and Politics, and was awarded a Ph.D. for the thesis he eventually published in book form as *The Evolution of Provincial Finance in British India*. His first published work, however, was a paper on "Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development" which he had originally read at an Anthropology seminar conducted by one of his professors. After completing his studies in America, Ambedkar left New York for London, where he was admitted to the London School of Economics and Political Science and to Gray's Inn. A year later his scholarship came to an end and it was only in 1920 that, having taught in a Bombay college and started a Marathi weekly called *Mooknayak* or "Leader of the Dumb", he was able to return to London and resume his studies there. In the course of the next three years he completed his thesis on *The Problem of the Rupee*, for which the University of London awarded him a D.Sc., and was called to the Bar. Before leaving England he spent three months in Germany, where he engaged in further studies in Eco-

nomics at the University of Bonn.

Thus the man who returned to India in April 1923 to continue his fight on behalf of the Untouchables and, indeed, all the Depressed Classes, was uniquely well equipped for the task, and from this time onwards it becomes increasingly difficult to separate the biography of Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar from the history of modern India. During his three year absence in London the Indian political scene had changed dramatically. The demand for independence from Britain had grown louder than ever: Mahatma Gandhi had started advocating a policy of non-cooperation with the Government and only a year before Ambedkar's return had launched the first of his campaigns for mass civil disobedience. But though Ambedkar was a staunch patriot, and though initially he was of the opinion that only political independence would bring social equality within the reach of the Depressed Classes, he was emphatic that if — as Gandhi and the Congress Party maintained — no country was good enough to rule over another it was equally true that no class was good enough to rule over another class. Certainly the Caste Hindus were not good enough to lord it over the Depressed Classes, and while Ambedkar remained sharply critical of British rule it was to the removal of the social, economic, educational, and legal disabilities of the Depressed Classes that he devoted the major part of his energies. As early as 1920 he had realized, however, that the interests of the Depressed Classes would have to be safeguarded by means of separate electorates, at least for a period, and it was his increasing insistence on this point that eventually brought him into open conflict with Mahatma Gandhi and the Congress Party, as well as with practically the whole of orthodox Hindu India.

This conflict did not come to a head until 1932. In the meantime Ambedkar established himself in Bombay, built up his legal practice, taught in college, gave evidence before various official bodies, started a newspaper, and was nominated to the Bombay Legislative Council, in whose proceedings he at once took a leading part. He also attended the three Round Table Conferences that were held in London to enable representatives of the various Indian communities and the three British political parties to consider proposals for the future constitution of India. One of his most significant achievements during the years immediately following his return to India in 1923 was the formation of the Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha or Depressed Classes Welfare Association, the objects of which were to promote the spread of education and culture among the Depressed Classes, to improve their economic condition, and to represent their grievances.

These grievances were serious enough. Untouchables were not allowed to enter Hindu temples, they could not draw water from public tanks or

wells, they were denied admittance to schools, and prevented from moving about freely in public places — and so on. Between 1927 and 1932 Ambedkar therefore led his followers in a series of non-violent campaigns to assert the right of the Untouchables to enter Hindu places of worship and to draw water from public tanks and wells. Two of these campaigns were of special importance. These were the campaigns against the exclusion of Untouchables from the Kalaram Temple, Nasik, and from the Chowdar Tank, Mahad, both of which involved tens of thousands of Untouchable satyagrahis or “passive resisters”, provoked a violently hostile reaction from the Caste Hindus and, in the case of the Chowdar Tank campaign, resulted in a legal as well as a moral victory for the Depressed Classes only after years of litigation. The Chowdar Tank campaign also saw the ceremonial burning of the Manusmriti or “Institutes of Manu”, the ancient Hindu law book that bore much of the responsibility for the cruel and degrading treatment that the Untouchables had hitherto suffered at the hands of the Caste Hindus. By committing the much-revered volume to the flames the Depressed Classes were serving notice to the orthodox Hindu community that in future they intended to be treated as human beings.

Unpopular as Ambedkar's activities had already made him with the Caste Hindus, during 1931 and 1932 he became more unpopular still. In his own words, he became the most hated man in India — hated, that is, by the Caste Hindus and by the Congress Party, which they dominated. The cause of the trouble was Ambedkar's continued insistence on the necessity of separate electorates for the Depressed Classes. Mahatma Gandhi and the Congress Party were opposed to separate electorates for the Depressed Classes (though not for the Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, and Europeans), and Ambedkar and Gandhi had clashed on the subject at the Second Round Table Conference, when the Mahatma went so far as to challenge the right of Ambedkar to represent the Untouchables. Ambedkar's arguments did, however, convince the British Government, and when Ramsay MacDonald published his Communal Award the following year the Depressed Classes were given the separate electorates for which they had asked. Gandhi's response was to go on a fast to the death for the abolition of separate electorates for the Depressed Classes. Since he was the acknowledged leader of the independence movement his action created consternation throughout India. Ambedkar was reviled as a traitor and threats were made against his life. But though unmoved by the pressure that was brought to bear on him Ambedkar was not unwilling to negotiate and eventually agreed to exchange separate electorates for joint electorates and a greatly increased number of reserved seats. This agreement was embodied in a document that became known as the Poona Pact, the signing of which by Ambedkar marked his

emergence as the undisputed leader of the Depressed Classes.

In the mood of relief that swept the country when the weak and ailing Mahatma ended his fast there was even a little sympathy to spare for the wretched Untouchables, but it did not last long, and soon Ambedkar was as much hated as ever. Partly as a result of the opposition he had encountered over the question of separate electorates, partly because of the continued exclusion of Untouchables from Hindu temples, Ambedkar now began to think that the Caste Hindus were not going to mend their ways. He therefore changed his tactics — though not his strategy — and started exhorting his followers to concentrate on raising their standard of living and gaining political power. He also began to think that there was no future for the Untouchables within Hinduism and that they should change their religion. These thoughts found dramatic expression at the 1935 Depressed Classes Conference, when he made his famous declaration that though he had been born a Hindu he did not intend to die one — a declaration that sent shock waves through Hindu India. In the same year Ambedkar was appointed principal of the Government Law College, Bombay, built a house for himself and his books, and lost his wife Ramabai. They had been married in 1908, when he was sixteen and she was nine and she had borne him five children, of whom only one survived. Though the demands of public life had left him with little time for his own domestic affairs, Ambedkar was deeply attached to the gentle and self-effacing woman and mourned her bitterly.

When he had recovered from his grief he plunged back into his customary activities and soon was busier than ever. In the course of the next few years he founded the Independent Labour Party, took part in the provincial elections that were held under the Government of India Act, 1935, was elected to the Bombay Legislative Assembly, pressed for the abolition of agricultural serfdom, defended the right of industrial workers to strike, advocated the promotion of birth control, and addressed meetings and conferences all over the Bombay Presidency. In 1939 World War II broke out in Europe and the fact that Britain was locked in a life-and-death struggle with Nazi Germany soon had its effect on the political situation in India. According to Gandhi and the Congress Party, Britain's difficulty was India's opportunity, and from 1940 they adopted a policy of non-cooperation with the Government war effort. Ambedkar did not agree with this attitude. Not only was he not a pacifist but he regarded Nazi ideology as a direct threat to the liberties of the Indian people. He therefore exhorted them to help defeat Nazism by supporting the Government, and himself encouraged the Untouchables to join the Indian Army. In 1941 he was appointed to the Defence Advisory Committee and in the following year

joined the Viceroy's Executive Council as Labour Member, a post he occupied for the next four years. During the same period he transformed the Independent Labour Party into the All-India Scheduled Caste Federation, founded the People's Education Society, and published a number of highly controversial books and pamphlets. Among the latter were *Thoughts on Pakistan*, *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables*, and *Who Were the Shudras?*

In 1947 India achieved independence and Ambedkar, who had already been elected a member of the Constituent Assembly, was invited by Pandit Nehru, the first prime minister of the country, to join the Cabinet as Minister for Law. A few weeks later the Assembly entrusted the task of framing the Constitution to a Draft Committee, and this committee elected Ambedkar as its chairman. For the next two years he was hard at work on the Draft Constitution, hammering it out article by article and clause by clause practically singlehanded. While he was thus engaged the country was passing through a period of turmoil. Independence had been won only at the cost of partition, partition had led to the wholesale slaughter of Hindus by Muslims and Muslims by Hindus, and at the beginning of 1948 Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated. Besides being deeply concerned about the fate of the Untouchables living in what was now Pakistan, Ambedkar had troubles of his own to face. His health had been deteriorating for some time, and now gave him cause for such grave concern that on the day following his fifty-eighth birthday he married a Brahmin woman doctor whom he had met in hospital and who would, he hoped, be able to provide him with the care he needed.

Despite his ill health Ambedkar managed to complete the Draft Constitution by the beginning of 1948 and later that year, when it had been before the country for six months, had the satisfaction of introducing it in the Constituent Assembly. Thereafter he piloted it through its three readings with his usual competence and in November 1949 it was adopted by the Assembly with very few amendments. The new Constitution gave general satisfaction and Ambedkar was warmly congratulated by friend and foe alike. Never had he been so popular. The press hailed him as the Modern Manu, and the irony of the fact that it was an Untouchable who had given Free India its Constitution was widely commented upon. Though he lived for seven more years, it was as the Architect of the Constitution and the Modern Manu that he was destined to pass into official history. When his statue came to be erected outside the parliament building after his death it was therefore as the Modern Manu that he was depicted, holding the Constitution underneath his arm and pointing in the direction of the parliament building. But though by 1948 Ambedkar had achieved so much,

and though today he is most widely remembered as the author of the Indian Constitution, his greatest achievement was in fact still to come.

This achievement was an essentially spiritual one, and it came only at the very end of his life, when he had spent several years in the political wilderness after failing to secure the passage of the Hindu Code Bill. The Bill represented a putting into shape by Ambedkar of work accomplished during the previous decade by a number of eminent Hindu lawyers and dealt with such matters as marriage and divorce, adoption, joint family property, women's property, and succession. Though it was a reforming rather than a revolutionary measure, the Bill met with violent opposition both inside and outside the Assembly, and even within the Cabinet. Ambedkar was accused of trying to destroy Hinduism and there were angry exchanges on the Assembly floor between him and his orthodox opponents. In the end the Bill was dropped after only four clauses had been passed and in September 1951, tired and disgusted, Ambedkar resigned from the Cabinet. In his resignation statement (which he was prevented from making in the Assembly itself) he explained that he had left the Cabinet for five reasons. The second of these was that it was apathetic to the uplift of the Scheduled Castes, the fifth that Pandit Nehru had failed to give adequate support to the Hindu Code Bill.

Ambedkar's resignation from the Cabinet marked the virtual end of his political career. In the general elections of January 1952 he failed to win a seat in the Lok Sabha or House of Representatives, and was equally unsuccessful when he contested a by-election the following year. Towards the end of March 1952 he was, however, elected to the Rajya Sabha or Council of States as one of the seventeen representatives of the State of Bombay, and was soon vigorously attacking the Government. But while he continued to participate in the proceedings of the Rajya Sabha, and was to do so until the end of his life, from now onwards Ambedkar's energies were increasingly devoted to more important things. Ever since the 1935 Depressed Classes Conference, when he had shocked Hindu India with the declaration that though he had been born a Hindu he did not intend to die one, he had been giving earnest consideration to the question of conversion. The longer he thought about it the more he was convinced that there was no future for the Untouchables within Hinduism, that they would have to adopt another religion, and that the best religion for them to adopt was Buddhism. During his years in office it had been hardly possible for him to bring about so momentous a change, but he had lost no opportunity of educating his followers in the issues involved, and it became increasingly apparent in which direction he — and they — were moving. In 1950 he not only praised the Buddha at the expense of Krishna, Christ, and Mohammed but

also visited Ceylon at the invitation of the Young Men's Buddhist Association, Colombo, addressed a meeting of the World Fellowship of Buddhists in Kandy, and appealed to the Untouchables of Ceylon to embrace Buddhism. In 1951 he defended the Buddha against the charge that he had been responsible for the downfall of the Indian woman and compiled the Buddha Upasana Patha, a small collection of Buddhist devotional texts. Thus when his resignation from the Cabinet, and his failure to secure election to the Lok Sabha, finally left Ambedkar with the time and energy for his greatest achievement, the ground was already well prepared.

In 1954 he twice visited Burma, the second time in order to attend the third conference of the World Fellowship of Buddhists in Rangoon. In 1955 he founded the Bharatiya Bauddha Mahasabha or Indian Buddhist Society and installed an image of the Buddha in a temple that had been built at Dehu Road, near Poona. Addressing the thousands of Untouchables who had assembled for the occasion, he declared that henceforth he would devote himself to the propagation of Buddhism in India. He also announced that he was writing a book explaining the tenets of Buddhism in simple language for the benefit of the common man. It might take him a year to complete the book, but when it was finished he would embrace Buddhism. The work in question was *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, on which he had been working since November 1951 and which he completed in February 1956. Not long afterwards Ambedkar, true to his word, announced that he would be embracing Buddhism in October of that year. Arrangements were accordingly made for the ceremony to be held in Nagpur, and on 14 October 1956 the Untouchable leader took the Three Refuges and Five Precepts from a Buddhist monk in the traditional manner and then in his turn administered them to the 380,000 men, women, and children who had come to Nagpur in response to his call. After further conversion ceremonies in Nagpur and Chanda Ambedkar returned to Delhi knowing that the Wheel of the Dharma had again been set in motion in India. A few weeks later he travelled to Kathmandu in Nepal for the fourth conference of the World Fellowship of Buddhists and addressed the delegates on "The Buddha and Karl Marx." On his way back to Delhi he made speeches in Benares and visited Kusinara, where the Buddha had died. In Delhi he took part in various Buddhist functions, attended the Rajya Sabha, and completed the last chapter of his book *The Buddha and Karl Marx*. On the evening of 5 December he asked for the Preface and Introduction to *The Buddha and His Dhamma* to be brought to his bedside, so that he could work on them during the night, and the following morning he was found dead. It was 6 December, he was 64 years and 7 months old, and he had been a Buddhist for only seven weeks.



But though Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar had been a Buddhist for only seven weeks, during that period he had probably done more for the promotion of Buddhism than any other Indian since Ashoka. At the time of his death three quarters of a million Untouchables had become Buddhists, and in the months that followed hundreds of thousands more took the same step — despite the uncertainty and confusion that had been created by the sudden loss of their great leader. So much was this the case that when the results of the 1961 census were published it was found that in the course of the previous decade the number of Buddhists in India had risen by a staggering 1,671 percent and that they now numbered 3,250,227, more than three quarters of whom lived in the State of Maharashtra. This was Ambedkar's last and greatest achievement, so that even though it was as the Architect of the Constitution of Free India and the Modern Manu that he passed into official history and is today most widely remembered, his real significance consists in the fact that it was he who established a revived Indian Buddhism on a firm foundation. It is therefore as the Modern Ashoka that he really deserves to be known, and the statue standing outside the parliament building in Delhi should really depict him holding The Buddha and His Dhamma underneath his arm and pointing — not for the benefit of the Untouchables only, but for the benefit of all mankind — in the direction of the Three Jewels.

In order to appreciate the nature of Ambedkar's achievement, and thus the real significance of the man himself, it will however be necessary for us to take a look at the diabolical system from which he sought to deliver the Untouchables, as well as to trace the successive stages of the road by which he — and his followers — travelled from Hinduism to Buddhism. We shall also have to see the way in which Ambedkar discovered his spiritual roots, explore his thoughts on the subject of the Buddha and the future of his religion, survey the historic occasion on which he and 380,000 Untouchables were spiritually reborn, study his posthumously published magnum opus and, finally, see what happened after his death.

## 2. ROOTS OF REVOLT

*There is no single time or place marked 'Start' for the modern Untouchable revolt against the caste system. By the end of the 19th Century a few Untouchables found access to new ideas and new resources. In local communities scattered across India they shaped a variety of ideologies and organizations as they sought to challenge an exploitative tradition. The following article describes some of the early Dalit ferment in western India, the region that became the base of operations for Dr. Ambedkar. The author is a Dalit historian and one of the editors of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches, an ongoing republication project of the government of Maharashtra. The article was presented to an international conference on racism and untouchability in New York City in 1983, and appears in Barbara Joshi (ed.), Untouchable! Voices From The Dalit Liberation Movement (London: Zed Books, and the Minority Rights Group, 1986).*

### From Dependence to Protest: The Early Growth of Education and Consciousness among Untouchables of Western India

*Vasant W. Moon (1983)*

It has become one of the truisms of the historical profession that the peasants of traditional societies are the "Silent Actors" of history. If this is true, the same applies to an even greater degree to the Untouchable communities of India. In attempting to trace the rise of an independent educational movement among Untouchables, we face an acute shortage of direct evidence about the realities of village social life for Untouchable castes even for most of the 19th Century. In this first section, therefore, I will restrict myself to some general observations about the conditions of these communities in the 19th and early 20th Centuries, as the background to the educational movements with which this paper is concerned.

We are all familiar, I think, with the social deprivations and humiliations which the religious writings of the Hindus demanded should be inflicted on the Untouchables. Their touch, shadow, and even the sound of their voices were deemed to be polluting. They were restricted to the most crude clothing and ornaments. Public wells were forbidden to them. They

were not to learn to read or write, and were prohibited from listening to any of the traditional sacred texts. The punishments to be inflicted on transgressors were set out in gruesome detail. Any act of disrespect, especially to the priestly caste of Brahmans, was to be punished with the utmost rigour. To a certain extent, the same disabilities were laid down for the "Shudra" lower castes of Hindus. Yet the peculiar social stigma suffered by Untouchables was something unique to them. As we shall see, the abhorrence of Untouchables was not something limited to the higher castes, but extended even to the lower "clean" Hindu castes.

It is very difficult to say how far these religious texts were applied in practice to the Untouchables. But there does seem to be evidence that in western India the severity with which caste boundaries and disabilities were applied had increased since the middle of the 18th Century, when political power passed into the hands of the Chitpavan Peshwas, themselves drawn from one of the highest Brahman castes. In his description of western Indian social structure, written at the end of the 19th Century, R.V. Russel set out some of the disabilities that Untouchables suffered. Under native rule, the Mahar, the largest local Untouchable caste, was subject to painful degradations. He might not spit on the ground lest a Hindu should be polluted by touching it with his foot, but had to hang an earthen pot around his neck to hold his spittle. He was made to drag a thorny branch behind him to brush out his footsteps, and when a Brahman came by had to lie at a distance on his face lest his shadow might fall upon the Brahman. In Gujarat, they were not allowed to tuck up the loin cloth, but had to trail it along the ground. Even quite recently in Bombay, a Mahar was not allowed to talk loudly in the street while a well-to-do Brahman or his wife was dining in one of the houses. In the city of Poona, seat of the ruling Chitpavan Brahmans, conditions were even worse: "The Mahars and Mangs were not allowed within the City of Poona between 3 p.m. and 9 a.m., because before 9 a.m. and after 3 p.m. their bodies cast too long a shadow, and whenever their shadow fell upon a Brahman it polluted him, so that he dare not take food or water until he had bathed and washed the impurity away."

In view of conditions such as these, we are safe in assuming that under Peshwa rule at least, Untouchable communities had no access to education, even of the most rudimentary kind. What is much less certain, however, is the question of "Untouchables" own attitudes to their status. It is hard to find any clear evidence of widespread or mass-based resistance. Dissent of a kind was, of course, expressed in the devotional *bhakti* movement in Maharashtra, with its emphasis upon the devotion of the individual believer, rather than the rigid hierarchies of caste. Protest was also expressed through

the myth, widespread amongst Untouchable groups, of an earlier high-caste status that was lost by the community through error or misfortune, such as the consumption of meat in desperation during periods of famine, or some accidental annoyance caused to one of the deities. These examples apart, we have little evidence of consistent self-conscious movements of protest. It may have been that Untouchables themselves had internalized the religious values of Hinduism, and so perceived the ordering of society to be legitimate, or more likely because they realized that the chances were heavily stacked against a successful protest.

### The Beginnings of Untouchable Education Under British Rule

Three factors were to assume importance for the growth of Untouchable movements as the 19th Century progressed. The first was the attitude and influence of British officials. The second was the effect of missionary activities on local Untouchable communities. The third was a growing realization among all Indians, including Untouchables, that in education lay the key to future political power, as the British government prepared to extend limited representative institutions to Indians themselves.

The issue of Untouchable education came increasingly frequently to the surface in the second half of the 19th Century, and, as we shall see, commonly took the following form. Christian missionaries in a particular area would concentrate their efforts of education and proselytization upon the Untouchables, as the most likely candidates for conversion. In doing so, they would encourage bright Untouchable students to apply for places in the government secondary schools. Upon their gaining admission, there would follow a large-scale desertion and vocal protest by the families of the "clean" (*savarna*) Hindu students. This in turn would set off worried consultations amongst the British officials responsible for the area. While these were usually sympathetic to the cause of Untouchable uplift, not all of them were prepared to see empty classes in the secondary schools, and most of them attempted to arrive at a compromise, such as sitting the Untouchable students on an outside verandah, and hoping for a relaxation in the attitudes of the local higher-caste Hindus as they became accustomed to seeing the Untouchable students in the schools.

While practices such as these were not calculated to bring about any major change in the educational levels of Untouchables, other aspects of British policy did serve to heighten their sense of the importance of education. As it became clear that the British government was prepared to devolve at least local political power upon Indians themselves, castes at all levels of Indian society quickly realized that the largest share of this power would go to those with an English education, professional qualifications and admini-

strative experience. By the 1880s, Untouchable leaders were becoming increasingly aware of the urgency of their need for education, if the Untouchable communities were to have any sort of influence upon Indian political life in the future.

### **Conflict Over Education: Some Case Studies of Untouchables in Government-aided Schools**

*The Recalcitrant Patel of Ranjangaon Ganpati:* The Reverend R. Winson referred a complaint from Mahars to Mr. W.A. East, Collector of Poona, under his letter of 14 January 1887. In his letter Rev. Winson pointed out that in September 1880, about seven years before, the Patel and the Kulkarni (village officers) of Ranjangaon Ganpati had compelled the Mahars of the village to close their school under violent threats, intimidation and persecution. On this complaint Mr. Stewart, the Collector at that time, had come to Sirur, a *talug* town, summoned the Patel and the Kulkarni, made enquiries and then suspended their services. After six months, they were reinstated on the understanding that they would never again resort to such treatment of Mahars, and that if they did they would be dismissed. A written promise had been obtained from them.

In spite of this, by a similar course of threat and persecution, the Patel had again forced the Mahars to close their school. Rev. Winson further stated that the Mahars appealed to the government for their protection and for the opening of their school. He therefore requested the Collector to do the needful, to relieve them of unjustifiable oppression and hindrance in their lawful pursuit.

Enquiry was held by Mr. Snow, the Assistant Collector, on 1 February 1887. He found the charge against the Patel proved, that the Patel "acted in a most violent, headstrong and foolish manner in threatening the Mahars". In spite of the report of Mr. Snow, Mr. East proposed that the Patel should be continued and suggested that the missionaries should be warned against interfering in any way between the Patel and the Mahars.

The matter then came up before Mr. Snow's superior, Mr. W. Lee Warner. In his judgement on 10 July 1887, Mr. Warner observed that neither Mr. Snow nor Mr. East had mentioned any incident proving exaggerated and false allegations or improper disobedience on the part of the Mahars, nor had he found any himself. Referring to the earlier decision about misconduct of the Patel, Mr. Warner said that the Patel had been expressly told that he would surely be dismissed if any obstruction occurred in future. He was therefore at a loss to understand how a mild caution could suitably meet the case. Mr. Warner further elaborated on official British policy, quoting the Secretary of State's despatch No. 5, dated 9 March

1866, para. 7, which observed:

"There is every reason to believe in the beneficial effect upon the Hindu Population in Bengal of the Education imparted to them under English Gentlemen of Character and acquirements such as the Missionaries. There is ample scope for the labour of all — the benefits resulting from the efforts in this direction of missionaries have repeatedly been acknowledged, and Her Majesty's Government would greatly regret that these efforts should be discouraged or that any ground should be afforded for supposing that Govt. or its officers are less disposed than before to afford encouragement to such valuable and disinterested exertions."

Mr. Warner's personal observations on the effect of education on the Mahars in Satara and Ahmednagar districts are quite interesting. He noted that a social revolution was going on, in the movement of Mahars and other low castes from status to contract. The Mahars now could sell their labour and were not required to work the customary village service in exchange for a livelihood based on customary perquisites received from other villagers as *baluta*. Mr. Warner states:

"The system of compelling the Mahars to stay at home is a device suggested by the specious pretence of precaution against crime, but really proposed by the village officers to suppress the movement towards their emancipation. In Ahmednagar where the Mahars have been most educated, they have risen from a condition of serfdom to free labour with the very best results."

[The case eventually worked its way to the Governor's office, where it encountered a final hurdle.]

The battle was still not fully won. When the matter of Ranjangaon schools went to the government, the Acting Chief Secretary noted (31 August 1887) his opinion, "that it is desirable to wait and see the effects of education and time and the Railways to remove prejudices, rather than to threaten, and to warn the Patel of the penalties." According to him, if orders were issued that Mahars, Dheds, Bhangis and other low castes must be admitted into the same room to sit by the side of the higher castes and the orders were obeyed, government schools would speedily be emptied. "It is a concession and a large concession, by the people generally, that they allow Mahars etc. to be under the same roof though not within the same walls as themselves. Give education time, and the work will do itself." To hurry it unnecessarily would see what work had been done at great risk of being undone, was the conclusion of the Acting Chief Secretary.

However the Governor opined that the government could undertake the opening of special schools for Mahars. He hoped that the higher castes would take a leading part in the education of the depressed classes in order

to prevent the social subversion which would follow their entire emancipation from tutelage.

The case of the Patel of Ranjangaon had set the stone rolling. The initiative of Rev. R. Winson, the missionary from Sirur, and the personal interest shown by Mr. L. Warner, Commissioner of the Division, shook the whole machinery of administration of the state government. The Patel, who had been appointed by the Governor, was ordered to be dismissed under Revenue Department letter dated 12 September 1887. It was also directed that instructions should be given to the new Patel that he not interfere in any way with the school or with the teachers. Thus ended the long-drawn-out battle of a missionary with the administration on the cause of education of low castes. The earlier apprehension of the officers that Rev. Winson was taking up the cause of Mahar boys and teachers only because these boys may be Christian converts was also proved wrong. Enquiry revealed that there was only one converted Christian from the Mahar community. The boys enrolled in the school were of low caste, but most were not converts.

*Dapoli — Untouchable Soldiers vs. Orthodoxy:* There is an interesting case of a similar battle, though with one important difference. In this event, the persons who carried through the war were Mahars themselves. They were retired British Army personnel. Ratnagiri District was the chief recruiting ground of the British Bombay Army, and a large portion of men enlisting there for service in infantry regiments were from the Untouchable Mahar and Chambar castes. After completion of their service, or retirement, they settled in some central or favourite village or town with some piece of land, cultivating their crops and bringing up their children, leading a peaceful quiet life. Of such men, a few commissioned and non-commissioned officers settled at Dapoli. This is the place where Dr. Ambedkar, the emancipator of the Untouchables, spent his early childhood and received his primary education.

Subhedar Major Gagnak and nine other military pensioners, including Ambedkar's father, sent a petition on 1 July 1892 to the president of Dapoli Municipality asking that their sons be admitted into the Municipal school and taught along with other boys. They stated that this arrangement would induce their boys to study hard and to emulate the example of the boys of other castes in the hope of attaining a high rank in their class. Opening a separate school for Mahar and other low caste boys would entail additional expenditure to the government exchequer. [One of the signatories of this petition is "Ramnak Malnak". Mahars used to suffix "nak" to their names until recently, later substituting "ji". Thus "Ramnak Malnak" becomes "Ramji Maleji", Dr. Ambedkar's father. He was also one of 1,588 pensioners who petitioned the government in 1904 for readmission of

Mahars into the Bombay Army after it was closed to them in 1892 by a change in British recruiting policy.]

This petition was forwarded by the Collector to the Chairman of the Municipality for report, who stated in reply on 5 August 1892 that if the Mahar boys were admitted into the school, the boys of other castes would leave it, and consequently the school would have to be closed. It would be better to open a separate school for Mahar boys and to engage a separate teacher.

The papers were placed before the quarterly meeting of the Municipality held on 6 August 1892, when it was resolved to inform the applicants that the request could not be granted as it would result in closing of the school. If, however, they could bring twenty-five boys of their caste, a separate school and separate teacher would be provided.

To this communication Subhedar Gagnak replied on 8 September 1892 that the petitioners could not undertake to secure an attendance of twenty-five low-caste boys to secure a new school for the reasons already mentioned. They asked for admission into the existing school and to have their boys taught with other boys. This reply was considered at a meeting of the Municipality on 9 September 1892 in which it was resolved that it was impossible to admit the Mahar boys into the existing school on account of the religious scruples of the parents of high-caste boys.

On 3 December 1892, the local Collector asked the Municipality whether something could not be done in this matter. In reply, the Municipality forwarded an extract of the resolution adopted on 9 September 1892 and stated that it was contemplated to extend the school and appoint an additional teacher for the benefit of Mahar boys, but this could not be effected for want of funds. Consequently these boys could not be admitted and allowed to sit in the verandah as proposed by the Collector. The Municipality then informed the petitioners that if they would consent to contribute Rs. 50/- to the cost of extension of the school, the Municipality would take up the work. The petitioners consented to this proposal. But nothing was done. The petitioners waited for about eleven months and sent the petition again in November 1893, hoping against hope, to the Additional Collector. After having exhausted their patience, they approached the Commissioner, Mr. T. Nugent, on 8 February 1894.

The Commissioner observed that the government orders were disregarded not only in the case of Dapoli but elsewhere. In his letter to the Collector on 21 May 1894, he observed:

"For over 18 months nothing seems to have been done to enable their [Pensioners'] sons to be educated at the Principle school, which is maintained for the benefit of boys of all castes and creeds and is paid for from the

taxes and rates collected from persons of all castes and creeds. The Municipality made proposals which were unreasonable and inadequate. I found that through bigotry and obstructiveness of the Municipal members and inertness displayed by the Dist. Officers, the low caste boys were debarred from obtaining any education and were positively refused admission."

[The Mahars persisted, and the Collector eventually asked the government to block all grants to the Municipality. At this point the Municipal Council retreated, and Mahar children were seated in the classrooms, though at a distance from other boys.]

*Policy and Public Conflict:* It is easier to see the implications of these and other cases of conflict if we remember the British government had laid down a policy of imparting education to low castes, one sharply at variance with earlier Peshwa rule. Section 591 of the Education Commissioner's Report said "that the principle has been laid down by the Court of Directors in their letter of 5th May, 1854, and in a subsequent reply to Government's letter dated 20/5/57". According to these letters, "nobody should be refused admission to a Government college or school merely on the ground of caste". This principle was reaffirmed in 1863. It was applicable to all institutions which were maintained at the cost of public funds, provincial or local. The Commission referred to the opposition to this principle which existed in Bombay itself, and rejected the opposition on the ground that education would advance them (low castes) in life and induce them to seek emancipation from this servile condition. The Commission therefore opined that this class of society requires special help, and they indicate the institution of schools as the best method.

The government of India officially commented on this principle further. "His Excellency the Governor in Council attached great importance to the provision of adequate educational facilities for children of low caste parents." In order to clarify any misapprehension the government of India wrote in letter no. 15/16, dated 19 June 1885 "that rule of admission irrespective of caste must be maintained".

The principle of equality was also emphasized in Her Majesty's message of 21 April 1856 in the passage in which she personally altered Lord Malmsbury's draft. The final declaration read: "We declare it to be our Royal will and pleasure that none be in any way favoured, none molested by reason of their faith, and that all alike enjoy the equal and impartial protection of law."

In contrast, the Indian intelligentsia, composed mainly of the higher castes, routinely opposed every reform on the grounds of its interfering with religion, thus causing injustice and persecution not only to the Untouchables but to women and non-Brahmans as well.

Despite government orders and frequently sincere efforts on the part of officers of government, there existed widespread opposition to the admission of Mahars to educational institutions. Mr. Waddington, Education Inspector from Negar, found during his inspection of government schools that the attendance of Mahars was limited, and even where they were admitted, a separate shed or room outside the school was provided for them.... He observed that village officers were parties to inciting ill-will against the low castes. The Christian missions were hindered in opening schools owing to village officers threatening to stop Mahar *haqs* or rights of *watan*. [Both terms refer to hereditary perquisites provided in exchange for village services demanded of Mahars, and were essential to Mahar economic survival.] It was not only mission schools; even in government schools, caste feeling was strong to work to stop the spread of education among the lower castes....

Strategies of the protagonists varied. If the government did not yield to the protests of the caste Hindus they sometimes withdrew their pupils and opened new schools. When petitions for equal treatment from Untouchables were turned down by the authorities, the Untouchables sometimes opened separate schools and sometimes continued to fight for access to existing schools. Sometimes they were supported by the missionaries and sometimes government officers came to their rescue.

For example, the Director of Public Instruction in Central Provinces and Berar, in his Quinquennial Review in 1905, reported that "At Nagpur, boys from the Depressed Class were required to sit in the verandah of the primary school apart from their fellow pupils. The community bitterly resented this and claimed equality of treatment. On meeting no response, they opened a school of their own."

There was a different result in Chandrapur. Sir Frank Sly, Governor of the Central Provinces and Berar, records that the caste Hindus refused entry to Untouchable students in the government English school of Chandrapur in the year 1870. Mr. Browning, the Director of Public Instruction, suggested opening a separate class for these boys, but Major Smith, Deputy Commissioner of Chandrapur, told the caste Hindus that they would have to abide by the principle of equal treatment. At this the caste Hindus withdrew their boys en masse. The Deputy Commissioner was firm, however, and reported to the government that he would prefer the school closed rather than allow the caste Hindus to practise discrimination in a public school. At last, caste Hindus surrendered and Untouchable children were admitted along with other boys. The local Collector was so excited over this victory that he intended to have a procession of these Untouchable children on an elephant to be taken through the city with a band of musicians

playing before them, but the higher authorities advised him to desist from such action. Nevertheless the Indian papers condemned the action of Major Smith and his officers in admitting the boys to the school; *Indu Prakash*, *Native Opinion*, *Mitrodaya* and all other newspapers wrote critical comments asking the government to mend the "mischief done by the imprudence of Major Smith". The *Indu Prakash*, in its issue of 16 May 1870, regretted that Lord Mayo, while in the city, concurred with the views of Major Smith (*Reports on Native Papers*).

It is interesting to find that all of the Hindu press, excepting only a few non-Brahman newspapers, was critical of the government's action permitting low-caste boys into the public schools. The only papers supporting Untouchable entry were the non-Brahman papers and Christian papers. This was true in spite of the fact that the low-caste Untouchables came from the caste Hindus' own religion. The caste Hindus did not object even to the admission of Muslim boys into schools with caste Hindus. But the same caste Hindu papers did not like the idea of separate education for European and Eurasian children who were Christians. *Indu Prakash* wrote in the issue of 12 October 1874, "Separate schools for Europeans are condemned as unreasonable. They are not prohibited from taking advantage of existing institutions."

### Early Untouchable Organizing in the Cause of Education

It was foretold by Mr. Cradock, the settlement Commissioner of Nagpur District, as early as the year 1900, that:

"Mahars will not remain for years downtrodden and are already pushing themselves from the state of degradation.... They have established a school of their own community.... He at present lacks education and self-respect, but these will come, and the day may not be far distant when a Mahar will be found among the ranks of the native magistracy (*Report of the Land Revenue Settlement of Nagpur District, 1900*).

The change was to come through education. In the beginning, as told earlier, Mahars tried to push their children into the public schools run by the government or by the missions. When they realized that this was not enough, they started establishing their own schools. One such early school was established in Nagpur in the last quarter of the 19th Century through the efforts of the Mahars. At the same time the Untouchables developed more sophisticated institutions to influence the general direction of Untouchable access to education.

By the end of the 19th Century, Mahars had started establishing their own institutions. In 1884, Janoji Khandare, a forest contractor, had started a free boys' hostel in Akola, a district town in Vidharba (statistics hereafter

are from the report of the Janoji Khandare Free Boarding House, 1927-28). Mr. Khandare used to approach other Mahar families, bringing these boys from various places for education, feeding them and teaching them under rigorous discipline. So long as he was alive, he himself bore the expenses of the hostel. A District Collector, after seeing the social concern of Janoji, allotted land of about 40 acres for maintenance of the hostel. This hostel is still being run by his descendants. The hostel produced several social and political workers of the 20th Century Mahar Movement. Besides education, students were forced to follow a daily programme which included prayers, gymnastics and games.

Efforts were made in other parts of Bombay Presidency too. One R.C. Rangrao had established schools and hostels on the Malabar coast in western India as early as 1896. In 1922, Mr. Paranjpe, the Education Minister of Bombay Presidency, issued orders for compulsory primary education. The Untouchables held meetings in support of government action and demanded strict enforcement of this social reform (*Dhana Prakash*, 27 January 1923). The low-caste leaders used to organize conferences and meetings throughout the length and breadth of western India. The resolutions passed in those meetings invariably included some call for establishment of hostels and schools, and for people to send their children to the schools and help the cause of education by contribution to the institutions.

In order to get an idea of this type of organizing being carried out in the first two decades amongst the low castes it would be proper to cite some illustrations.

On the eve of a discussion in Nagpur on educational improvement of low castes, an invitation was distributed (on 18 December 1912) in which it was emphasized that the opportunity offered during the rule of King Edward V should not be missed. A 1913 conference of Mahars at Nagpur passed several resolutions, one of which was in honour of Mr. K.C. Nandagoli, for establishing the first girls' school in 1911 at his own expense of Rs. 3000/-. On 29 May 1921, a Mahar conference in Berar, at Badnera in Amravati District, passed the following resolutions, among thirteen others, which indicate the general trend of efforts to influence policy:

1. That Government should impart free and compulsory primary education.
2. That the numbers of scholarships in schools and colleges should be increased.
3. That the age limit for Depressed Classes boys appearing for the matriculation examination should be withdrawn.
4. That Depressed Classes students should be admitted to Normal schools without consideration of merit.

5. That since low-caste students were still barred from Government hostels, they incurred greater expenses than other students and so the amount of their scholarship should be increased.
6. That Free Boarding Houses for Depressed Classes students be established.
7. That Depressed Classes teachers who had qualified should be appointed as Inspectors of schools.

In the Legislative Council of the Central Provinces and Berar, Mr. K.C. Nandagoli, a representative of the Depressed Classes, carried the effort to influence general public policy further. He moved a resolution on 16 March 1921, for the appointment of a committee to enquire into the problem of the Depressed Classes. The committee inquired into two aspects of the problem: first, the employment of Depressed Classes in the public services; secondly, the action which should be taken to facilitate their education. Lack of space here prevents me from going fully into the details of the report. However, it is worth noting that the final resolution adopted by the government conceded a number of the demands made by Mr. Nandagoli. These included a specific assurance that no properly qualified Depressed Classes candidate for government employment would be discriminated against on account of his social position, nor would there be any such discrimination in the case of candidates applying for admission to the government schools. Government also accepted the point that Depressed Classes scholars incurred greater expenses for their living than other students and that their scholarships should be increased accordingly.

### Conclusion

I have attempted here to sketch the emergence of conscious and vociferous Untouchable opposition to the social values and religious hierarchies of Hindu society. This movement later expanded under the leadership of Dr. Ambedkar, but it was perhaps first of all in the field of education that the Untouchable communities gained some idea of the resistance which their efforts at uplift would encounter from other Hindus. From this experience came in part the remarkable transformation in consciousness which was evident by the 1920s. From the same experience grew also the conviction that if the Untouchable communities were to achieve any substantial change in their condition, it would not be as a result of any growing liberalization of attitudes amongst the Hindus, but rather in spite of their fiercest opposition. This bitter awareness of isolation and separation was to grow in strength to become the hallmark of the movement under Dr. Ambedkar, and to culminate on that day in 1956 when he led hundreds of thousands into conversion to Buddhism in outright rejection of the Hindu social order.

## 3. AMBEDKAR SPEAKS

*We cannot compress the vast body of Dr. Ambedkar's speeches and writings into a few pages, but we have chosen examples from three important points in his life — the 1927 Mahad satyagraha which crystalized his leadership of the Untouchable revolt against the caste system; an historic 1936 conference at which he urged his followers to rethink their centuries-old ties to the Hindu tradition; and the 1949 Constituent Assembly debates as the new Indian nation prepared to adopt a Constitution.*

*The 1927 human rights campaign at Mahad, a provincial town in western India, involved the Untouchables' right to drink water from the municipal water tank, but Ambedkar made it clear that the real issue was the caste system itself. He assured his followers that what was needed was not just better access to water, but a better society; India could not be united, and the Untouchables could not be free, while the old society survived. The following summary of Dr. Ambedkar's address to the Mahad campaign conference was published in The Indian National Herald on December 25th, 1927. It has been reprinted in the Government of Maharashtra's Source Material on Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Vol. 1 (Bombay: Government of Maharashtra Press, 1982).*

### India Needs A Social Revolution

*Dr. B. R. Ambedkar (1927)*

Welcoming the *satyagrahis* [non-violent campaigners] on behalf of the *Satyagraha* Committee, of which he is the president, Dr. Ambedkar reminded them of the unfortunate ending of the Conference held at the same place in March, when a number of their fellow delegates had been ill-treated and assaulted by the so-called Caste-Hindus for committing the offence of drawing water from a public tank named "Chowdar".... Continuing, Dr. Ambedkar said: "Had the Caste-Hindus admitted the right of the Depressed Classes to use the tank, this *satyagraha* would not have been necessary. Unfortunately, however, the Caste-Hindus at this place are obstinate in their attitude and refuse to admit the right of the Depressed Classes to use the public tank which is open to persons of all other castes, including Mohammedans and other non-Hindus. The irony of the situation is that although the cattle owned by the so-called Untouchables are allowed

to go, their owners, who are as good human beings as the other people, are prohibited from going to the tank.

The Hindus are known for their humanitarian sentiments, and their regard for animal life is proverbial. Some sections do not kill even poisonous reptiles. The Hindus maintain a large army of *sadhus* and able-bodied beggars, and believe that they acquire merit by feeding and clothing them and giving them cash for indulging in luxuries. The Hindu philosophy teaches the doctrine of an all-pervading soul, and the *Geeta* exhorts them to make no distinction between a Brahman and a Chandal [Untouchable].

The question therefore arises why the Hindus having such traditions of charity and humanity and possessing such grand philosophy should behave so heartlessly towards their fellow human beings and in such unreasonable ways. In the reply to this question lies the real significance of this Conference. The Hindu community is set in the steel frame of the caste system, in which one caste is lower than another in social gradation involving particular privileges, rights, inhibitions and disabilities with regard to each caste. This system has created vested interests which depend upon maintaining the inequalities resulting from the system.

The so-called Caste-Hindus are bitterly opposed to the *Panchamas* (persons belonging to the fifth class, the depressed class) using a public tank not because they really believe that the water will be thereby spoiled or will evaporate if Mahars [the largest "Untouchable" caste in Maharashtra] and others use the tank, but because they are afraid of losing their superiority of caste, and of equality being established between the former and the latter. We are resorting to this *satyagraha* not because we believe that the water of this particular tank has any exceptional qualities, but to establish our natural rights as citizens and human beings.

This Conference is held to unfurl the banner of *Equality*, and thus may be likened to the National Assembly in France convened in 1789. Our Conference aims at the same achievement in social, religious, civic and economic matters. We are avowedly out to smash the steel frame of the caste system.

Some men may say that we should be satisfied with the abolition of untouchability only, leaving the caste system alone. The aim of abolishing untouchability alone without trying to abolish the inequalities inherent in the caste system is a very low aim. Let us remember, "not failure but low aim is a crime". Let us probe the evil to its very roots and be not satisfied with mere palliatives to assuage our pain. If the disease is not rightly diagnosed the remedy will be useless and the cure may be postponed.

Not only untouchability and restriction regarding intercaste dining must be removed, but intermarriages among the Hindus of various castes

must be made common. This alone will lead to the establishment of true equality. Even supposing that the stigma of untouchability is wiped out, what will be the status of the present Untouchables? At the most they will be treated as *Shudras* [low status laboring castes in the four-part Hindu *varna* system]. And what are the rights of the *Shudras*? The *Smritis* [sacred Hindu texts] treat them as mere zelots, and the *Smritis* are the guides of the Caste-Hindus in the matter of gradations in the caste system. Are you willing to be treated as *Shudras*? Are you willing to accept the position of zelots? Are you prepared to leave your fate in the hands of the upper class?

That the caste system must be abolished if the Hindu society is to be reconstructed on the basis of equality, goes without saying. Untouchability has its roots in the caste system. We cannot expect the *Brahmins* to rise in revolt against the caste system, because that system confers on them certain special privileges and they will not willingly give up their privileged position and their present supremacy in the hierarchy of Hinduism as based on the *Smritis*. It would be too much to expect them to resign all their privileges as the *Samurais* of Japan did. Also we cannot rely upon the non-Brahmins and ask them to fight our battle. Many of them are still enamoured of the caste system and are tools in the hands of the Brahmins, and most of the others who resent the supremacy of the Brahmins are more interested in levelling down the Brahmins than in levelling up the suppressed classes. They too want a class of people on whom they can look down and have the satisfaction of not being quite the under-dogs of society. This means that we ourselves must fight our battles, relying on ourselves. We are the most down-trodden classes in the country. Services in the army, police and public offices are practically closed to us. We are debarred from following a number of trades and professions and we have been reduced to utter economic helplessness. All this is due to the untouchability and the lowest social position to which we have been relegated. Sould we fail to assert our rights as human beings and citizens we shall have to remain fallen forever.

Ours is a movement which aims at not only removing our own disabilities, but also at bringing about a social revolution, a revolution that will remove all man-made barriers of caste by providing equal opportunities to all to rise to the highest position and making no distinction between man and man so far as civic rights are concerned. If we achieve success in our movement to unite all the Hindus in a single caste we shall have rendered the greatest service to the Indian nation in general and to the Hindu community in particular. The present caste system with its invidious distinction and unjust dispensations is one of the greatest sources of our communal and national weakness. Our movement stands for strength and solidarity; for equality, liberty, and fraternity. We wish to carry on our movement as



peacefully as we can. However, our determination to remain non-violent will to a large extent depend upon the attitude of our opponents. We are not the aggressors, and that our oppressors for generations should accuse us of aggression is a strange thing. We refuse to be controlled and bound by the *Shastras* and *Smritis* composed in the Dark Ages, and we base our claims on justice and humanity.

## What Path Freedom?

*Dr. B.R. Ambedkar (trans. Vasant W. Moon) (1936)*

*Rebuilding society was critically important to Dr. Ambedkar, and presented him with a problem. He devoted much of his life to building new democratic institutions, but he was convinced that legislation and law were not enough to create a radically new society. A new society needed new spiritual moorings as well. In 1956 Ambedkar joined 500,000 of his followers in converting to Buddhism, but the journey had begun long before. The following excerpt is from his speech to an Untouchable conference in 1936. In it he expresses his conviction that religions are purely man-made institutions. They can provide cultural reinforcement for a rational and humane society, or they can reinforce superstition and social tyranny. Since religion is a social convention and a matter of choice, Dalits can — and must — choose what religion will help them construct a better world. The English translation of this speech was printed in The Oppressed Indian, a Dalit periodical, in 1978.*

There are two aspects of conversion. Social as well as religious; material as well as spiritual. Whatever may be the aspect, or line of thinking, it is necessary to understand the beginning, the nature of untouchability and how it is practised. Without this understanding, you will not be able to realize the real meaning underlying my declaration of conversion.

In order to have a clear understanding of untouchability and its practice in real life, I want you to recall the stories of the atrocities perpetrated against you. The instances of beating by caste Hindus for the simple reason that you have claimed the right to enroll your children in government schools, or the right to draw water from a public well, or the right to take a marriage procession with the groom on horseback, are very common. You all know such instances, as they happen before your eyes. But there are several other causes for which atrocities are committed on the Untouchables

by the caste Hindus which, if revealed, surprise foreigners. The Untouchables are beaten for putting on clothes of good quality. They have been whipped because they used utensils made of metal like copper, etc. Their houses are burnt because they have brought land under cultivation. They are beaten for putting on the sacred thread. [A visible symbol worn by high-caste Hindus.] They are beaten for refusing to carry dead animals and eat carrion, or for walking through the village with socks and shoes on, or for not bowing down before the caste Hindus, for taking water in a copper pot while going out to the fields to ease themselves. Recently an instance has been noted where the Untouchables were beaten for serving chapatis at a dinner party.

You must have heard and some of you must have experienced such atrocities. Where beating is not possible, you are aware of how the weapon of boycott is used against you. You all know how the caste Hindus have made daily life unbearable by prohibiting you from getting work, by not allowing your cattle to graze in the jungles and prohibiting your men from entering the village. But very few of you have realized why all this happens. What is the root of their tyranny? To me, it is very necessary that we understand it.

The instances cited above have nothing to do with the virtues and vices of an individual. This is not a feud between two rival men. The problem of untouchability is a matter of class struggle. It is a struggle between caste Hindus and the Untouchables. This is not a matter of doing injustice against one man. This is a matter of injustice being done by one class against another. This struggle is related to social status. This struggle indicates how one class should keep its relationship with another class of people. The struggle starts as soon as you start claiming equal treatment with others. Had it not been so, there would have been no struggle over simple reasons like serving chapatis, wearing good quality clothes, putting on the sacred thread, fetching water in a metal pot, sitting the bridegroom on the back of a horse, etc. In these cases you spend your own money. Why then do the high-caste Hindus get irritated? The reason for their anger is very simple. Your behaving on par with them insults them. Your status in their eyes is low; you are impure, you must remain at the lowest rung. Then alone will they allow you to live happily. The moment you cross your level the struggle starts.

The instances given above also prove one more fact. Untouchability is not a short or temporary feature; it is a permanent one. To put it straight, it can be said that the struggle between the Hindus and the Untouchables is a permanent phenomenon. It is eternal, because the high-caste people believe that the religion which has placed you at the lowest level of the society is

itself eternal. No change according to time and circumstances is possible. You are at the lowest rung of the ladder today. You shall remain lowest forever.

This means the struggle between Hindus and Untouchables shall continue forever. How you will survive through this struggle is the main question. And unless you think it over, there is no way out. Those who desire to live in obedience to the dictates of the Hindus, those who wish to remain their slaves, they do not need to think over the problem. But those who wish to live a life of self-respect and equality will have to think over this.

... What is religion? Why is it necessary? Let us first try to understand. Several people have tried to define religion, ut amongst all of these definitions, only one is most meaningful and agreeable to all. "That which governs people is religion." That is the true definition of religion. This is not my definition. Mr. Tilak, the foremost leader of the Sanatani [orthodox] Hindus himself is the author of this definition. So nobody can accuse me of having interpolated the definition of religion. However, I have not accepted it merely for argument's sake. I accept it as a principle. Religion means the rules imposed for the maintenance of society. I also have the same concept of religion.

Although this definition logically appears to be correct, it does not disclose or clarify the nature of rules which govern a society. The question still remains as to what should be the nature of the rules which govern society. This question is more important than that of definition. Because the question of which religion is necessary for man does not depend on its definition but on the motive and nature of the rules that bind and govern a society. What should be the real nature of religion? While deciding this question, another question follows. What should be the relation between a man and society?

The modern social philosophers have postulated three answers to this question. Some have said that the ultimate goal of society is to achieve happiness for the individual. Some say that society exists for the development of the inherent qualities and energies of man and to help him develop himself. However, some claim that the chief object of social organization is not the development or happiness of the individual but the creation of an ideal society. There is no place for an individual in Hindu society. The Hindu religion does not teach how an individual should behave with another individual. A religion which does not recognize the individual is not personally acceptable to me. Although society is necessary for the individual, mere societal welfare cannot be the ultimate goal of religion. According to me individual welfare and progress (individual development) should be the

real aim of religion. Although the individual is a part of the society, its relation with society is not like the body and its organs, or the cart and its wheels. [A well-known Hindu text described the different categories of castes as different parts of the body.]

... I tell you all very specifically, religion is for man and not man for religion. To get human treatment, convert yourselves. Convert for getting organized. Convert for becoming strong. Convert for securing equality. Convert for getting liberty. Convert so that your domestic life may be happy. Why do you remain in that religion which prohibits you from entering a temple? Why do you remain in that religion which prohibits you from drinking water from a public well? Why do you remain in that religion which prohibits you from getting a job? Why do you remain in that religion which insults you at every step? A religion in which man's human behaviour with man is prohibited is not religion but a display of force. A religion in which the touch of human beings is prohibited is not religion but a mockery. A religion which precludes some classes from education, forbids them to accumulate any wealth and to bear arms, is not religion but a mockery of human beings. A religion that compels the ignorant to be ignorant and the poor to be poor is not a religion but a punishment.

... I also take leave of you in the words of the Buddha. Be your own guide! Take refuge in reason! Do not listen to the advice of others! Do not succumb to others! Be truthful! Take refuge in truth! Never surrender to anybody! If you keep in mind this message of the Buddha at this juncture, I am sure your decisions will not be wrong.

## 4. WOMEN'S VOICES

*Recently two Dalit women, Meenakshi Moon and Urmila Pawar, set out to record the role of women in the early days of the Dalit movement in western India. Their study, written in Marathi, was published in Pune in 1989 under the title We Made History Too. In many ways the authors themselves are continuing to make history. They are both self-taught historians and writers and are among the growing number of Dalit women who are playing an important role in contemporary community life. We must hope that news of their work will encourage Dalit women in other regions of India to research and record the rapidly fading history of women in the early days of other distinctive Untouchable movements. The following synopsis was prepared by Mrs. Moon and Mrs. Pawar to describe their findings and their experiences during their research. This English synopsis and the accompanying editorial notes were first published in the South Asia Bulletin (Vol. 9, No. 2), 1989.*

### We Made History Too: Women in the Early Untouchable Liberation Movement

*Meenakshi Moon and Urmila Pawar (1989).*

The story of women's participation in the Untouchable Movement is an interesting one. To trace the early activism of Untouchable women one has to go back to the beginning of the 20th century. In the following decades women's activities developed from mere participation as beneficiaries or as audience, to the shouldering of significant responsibility in various fields of activity in the Ambedkar movement.

In the first decade of the 20th century we find Shivram Janaba Kamble taking up the mission of removing the stigma of prostitution from the face of the Untouchables. In 1908, through his magazine *Somvanshi Mitra*, he wrote articles asking his community to accept in marriage the hands of women who had been thrown into the degrading profession of prostitution through the practice of giving girls to Hindu temples as *devadasis* (slaves of the God). Besides writing articles Mr. Kamble conducted various meetings to awaken and enlighten people and appealed to them to abandon the practice of offering girls to the god and goddess of Jejuri known as Khandoba and Yellamama.

Mr. Kamble's efforts yielded positive results. One *devadasi* named Shivubai responded to the call and wrote a very long letter explaining the miserable life of the wretched women and offering herself in marriage to any willing person. In response to her call, published by Kamble in his magazine, one of his associates, Ganpatrao Hunmantrao Gaikwad, agreed to marry Shivubai. Accordingly the marriage was solemnized and was given wide publicity. Not only did Mr. Kamble encourage such marriages but he also saw to it that these women got respect and dignity in society. His propaganda against the devadasi system was so effective that in the year 1909 not a single girl was offered to Khandoba as a *devadasi*. It was also found that other slave girls of the God (prostitutes) were accepted by the young boys of the Untouchable community as their wives.

The early movement of Untouchables in Maharashtra also led to increasing participation by women in conferences. A Nagpur woman, a nurse, described her experiences of untouchability to the all-India women's conference of 1920. Other women were brought before audiences either to welcome the guest speakers in the conferences or to sing the welcome songs in the meetings.

The movement begun by Dr. Ambedkar generated even more enthusiastic participation. Dr. Ambedkar organized several conferences of the Untouchables. He saw to it that women's conferences were held simultaneously with those for men. By 1930 women had become so conscious that they started conducting their own meetings and conferences independently.

In Mahad in 1927, during the historic *satyagraha* movement to claim the right of Untouchables to take water from the public tank, Dalit women not only participated in the procession with Dr. Ambedkar but also participated in the deliberations of the subject committee meetings in passing resolutions about the claim for equal human rights.

In the Nasik *satyagraha*, started by Ambedkar in 1930 for the right of Untouchables to enter Hindu temples, several hundred women conducted sit-in agitations in front of the temple and courted arrest. Every batch of volunteers consisted of some women. Some of the women still alive have been interviewed during this research. This *satyagraha* was carried on until 1935, when on the 13th of October Dr. Ambedkar declared at Yeola (near Nasik) that he had been born a Hindu but would not die a Hindu. In the Yeola conference Dr. Ambedkar announced this *satyagraha* was terminated, as the heart of the Hindus was not likely to change. He also said that his objective was to organize and to awaken the Untouchables themselves.

During this period, women conducted meetings to support separate electorates for the Untouchables, and passed resolutions accordingly. In

May 1936 the women held an independent conference along with one for men in Bombay to support Dr. Ambedkar's declaration of intent to convert to a non-Hindu religion. The speeches of women, reported exhaustively in *Janata Weekly*, show that women were very frank in stating that they wanted a religion that would recognize their freedom, dignity, and equal status with men. They expressed confidence that Dr. Ambedkar would not drag them into a religion where women would have to wear the *burkha* or live in *purdah*.

The resolutions passed by women in various conferences demanded (1) Free and compulsory education for girls, (2) Women's representation in state legislative assemblies, local bodies, etc., (3) Training for self protection of Untouchable women, such as wielding of sticks or karate, (4) Starting a women's wing in the Samta Sainik Dal (Equality Volunteer Corps), (5) Prohibiting child marriages. In some places women made efforts, with the help of Ambedkarite leaders, to rescue women kidnapped by Muslim hooligans. Efforts also were made to rescue women from prostitution areas. This was done in Nagpur in 1936.

Efforts were made by all Ambedkarite workers to encourage women's education. The research revealed that the first girl's school in the Untouchable community was started by Kalicharan Nandagavali, who later became the first Untouchable representative from Gondia to the Central Provinces Legislative Council during the 1920s. Similar schools were started in the Konkan region and at a few other places. In 1924 in Nagpur the first woman to start a girl's school was Jaibai Chaudhari, who herself secured an education against heavy odds and against the wishes of her husband. She was encouraged and helped in her work by a Christian nun. Other women social workers started independent hostels exclusively for girls during the 1930s.

The political contribution movement begun by Dr. Ambedkar brought forth the political ambition of Untouchable women. The women conducted conferences and passed resolutions to support the Independent Labour Party and later the Scheduled Castes Federation programs. In describing the 1942 conference of women at Nagpur, held at the same time as the meeting of the Scheduled Castes Federation, Dr. Ambedkar said, "The presence of women in the conference in their thousands was a sight for the gods to witness. Their dress, their cleanliness and the confidence with which they behaved in the conference brought delight to my heart." Similar conferences of women of great magnitude were organized at Kanpur (1944), Bombay (1945), and Calcutta (1946).

In all these conferences women leaders, *viz.* Minambal Shivraj from Madras, Sulochana Dongre of Amravati, Shantabai Dani and several other

women addressed the meetings. Radhabai Kamble, a worker in a cotton mill, had come up as a labour leader in the Ambedkarite movement in the 1920s. She gave evidence before the Royal Commission of Labour in 1929. The Untouchable women also joined the political agitations and courted arrest and underwent jail during the Scheduled Caste Federation's 1946 *satyagraha* in the State Assemblies. From all this it will be clear that women had made great strides in achieving political consciousness.

The research shows that women also were interested in reforming the marriage system. Untouchable society already permitted divorce, remarriage, and widow marriage, but the women in the movement brought several further reforms in the marriage system. They opposed child marriage, and actively encouraged remarriage and widow marriage. They tried to eliminate unnecessary rituals in the marriage ceremony, and tried to reduce expenses in the marriage. They even adopted marriages through advertisement, which was not acceptable then even among higher classes. Even marriages among different Untouchable subcastes were welcomed. Such reforms were often ahead of the higher castes.

The research has also documented the change that has occurred among women since the great conversion to Buddhism in 1956. Normally it is believed that women are mostly conservative in cultural matters and not amenable to change, but Dalit women accepted the progressive religion of Buddha voluntarily and adopted the new religion. They have given up old customs, rites and rituals, visits to Hindu pilgrimage sites, fasting on various Hindu festivals, etc. The women have also adopted the Buddhist form of worship and way of life which is based on morality, wisdom and compassion. The conversion has changed their outlook about caste so much that the new generation of Buddhists hardly knows its subcaste, and many intercaste marriages have been welcomed in the Buddhist faith. Formerly girls were given contemptuous names which indicated their low position and caste. Now the Buddhist women name their daughters after great women from Buddhist history.

*A Note on Our Research Process.* The research on this project included locating and reviewing various newspapers published within the Untouchables community during the last hundred years. These include *Dhnyanprakash*, *Bahishkrit Bharat*, *Janata*, *Somvanshi Mitra*, etc. In addition to these, some scholarly publications by eminent writers, census and other relevant reports, rare booklets, leaflets and similar material have been explored.

The major portion of the research involved interviews of approximately sixty women who were connected with the Ambedkarite movement. Some information has been obtained from the relatives of deceased participants in the movement. This information was collected from various places in

Maharashtra and also from Delhi.

The research as a whole throws a flood of light on various activities of women which were hitherto unknown. As far as we know nobody has so far dealt with this subject.

We interviewed women participants in the Ambedkar movement in order to understand what role they played in the movement; what sort of experiences they had in the field as well as in the family as mother, wife, and daughter; what was the effect on their life of Ambedkar's movement and speeches; what difference was there between a common housewife and a Dalit woman social worker; how far these women are aware of continuing atrocities on women and similar issues.

We travelled throughout Maharashtra and contacted women workers in Bombay, Pune, Satara, Nagpur, Nasik and sometimes in the countryside. We also visited Delhi. Sometimes we could give advance notice, but most of the time we had to take them by surprise. Several times we had to remain without food and water, but when we reached somebody's house we were showered with warm hospitality and love.

At some places we were told that such and such woman was an active worker, but on verification or in a personal meeting the woman would be frank in saying that she was not the woman we wanted. Another thing we noticed was their utter sincerity and honesty in speaking about their own life, and their willingness to help us learn about other women. Thus by lighting one candle from another, the picture of the Ambedkarite movement became clearer and clearer.

Most of the women we met are illiterates, but some are teachers, some are writers, and three or four are Buddhist nuns. A couple of the women are legislators, and some are in local bodies. Most of the women active in the movement were born in social workers' families, or were given in marriage into such families. Some lived in neighborhoods where social activities were going on and became involved.

For all of them Dr. Ambedkar's words and movement had an inspiring effect on their minds. Even the participants in the movement who were illiterate subscribed to Ambedkar's journals, e.g. *Mooknayak*, *Bahishkrit Bharat*, *Janata*, *Prabuddha Bharat* to keep these publications alive. It was heartening to see that women contributed even from their own meager income for almost every activity that was going on in the movement. They paid four *annas* or eight *annas* when their daily wages were hardly a *rupee*. (There are sixteen *annas* in a *rupee*.) These contributions were very significant in the movement.

While joining the processions, *satyagrahas*, etc. these women had to entrust their children and family responsibilities to a neighbor or to a close

relative like mother or daughter. Occasionally some of them had cooperation from their husbands, but some of them had to face brutal beatings at their husband's hand. Some women courted arrest along with men in *satyagrahas*. At such times, some of them took their infant babies with them to jail, and some carried all their belongings including chickens. Those who left their nursing babies at home complained of breast pains while in jail. In order to facilitate social work a few women underwent family planning operations, while a few brought home a second wife for the husband.

We have noticed that these women who were once meek and shy are now self-reliant and dare-devil. Taking into consideration the extremely backward social atmosphere, the achievements of these women were most commendable. Schools and hostels and orphanages for girls were started by women like Jaibai Choudhari and Deshbhratar in the Nagpur area. Radhabai Kamble shouldered leadership in the labour movement. Sakhubbai Mohite and Suman Bandisode were among several women who led organizations and participated in such movements as the struggle to rename Marathwada University, extend (affirmative action) reservations to Buddhists, and provide land to landless labourers.

The women also continue to be interested in political work. The Republican Party, founded by Ambedkar in 1958, was split into several groups after his death. The women we met were working through these groups but are not happy with these divisions. They expect that the whole Dalit leadership should unite and work as a whole and take the chariot of Ambedkar's work ahead.

## 5. THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES TODAY

*Although the Untouchables have made great strides in modern India, a truly equal society remains a distant vision. Often, small steps forward have triggered violent resistance. The following article describes one of many examples of this mixture of progress, suffering, and conflict. A more extensive version of this article appears in Claude Welch and Virginia Leary (eds.), Asian Perspectives on Human Rights (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1990). This chapter concludes with a recent report of official Indian statistics on violence against Untouchables.*

### Human Rights As Dynamic Process: The Case of India's Untouchables

*Dr. Barbara R. Joshi (1990)*

There is a precarious, volatile quality to the human rights status of India's large Untouchable population. Modern constitutional law guarantees a full range of social, economic, and political rights. Tradition insists that those born into Untouchable castes are inherently inferior beings. Daily reality is a constant struggle between past and possible future. Any evaluation of Untouchable status thus becomes a study of human rights as dynamic process.

The Untouchables' unfolding story is a particularly complex one. The Untouchables' struggle today is shaped by the continuation of a very old pattern of exploitation and oppression that was legitimized and enforced through a variety of institutions — religious, social, and economic, as well as political. The realization of full and equal human rights for Untouchables thus requires changes in the relationships among different groups of citizens within each of these arenas.

The Untouchable population is vast: more than 100 million people, approximately one out of every seven Indian citizens, is born into one of the many different hereditary castes that traditionally have been regarded as belonging at the bottom of the steeply hierarchic social order. Classical Hindu philosophy used the theories of *karma* and reincarnation to justify systematic suppression of the Untouchable castes — those who had sinned especially grievously in some past existence were reborn into Untouchable castes and were thus inherently inferior to all others in society.

"In" is a critically important word here, for although untouchability imposed a variety of humiliating forms of physical segregation, the Untouchables were very definitely not external from the realm of the dominant society. Untouchability rationalized one way of limiting potential competition from a large hereditary category, while at the same time keeping this human category available as a readily exploitable labor force. Given the tremendous advantages this system offered to all others in society, it is hardly surprising that untouchability as a systematic denial of group rights has expanded beyond the ideological border of orthodox Hinduism. For generations both the Sikh and Christian communities have preserved untouchability in spite of theologies that deny the legitimacy of caste and caste hierarchy. On a secular plane, a number of modern Indian opponents of radical status change for Untouchables have borrowed freely from the West's ever-evolving arsenal of rationalizations for its own racial variation on a theme of inequality.

For most people, the details of rationalization are not especially important. "They" are not like "Us" and have no business laying claim to a share of "Our" dominance of land, the professions, political authority. The only important question is how to keep "Them" in their rightfully subservient position. It is the sheer vicious ferocity of some of these efforts that attracts attention, but violence is only a small part of the total picture. Most efforts to block Untouchable claims to human equality are far less conspicuous but in the aggregate they are far more destructive. The endless maneuvers of denial by higher caste bureaucrats, businessmen, landowners, judges, and teachers function as forms of silent violence and violation.

All of this stands in stark contrast to the legal provisions that abolish untouchability. It also stands in open conflict with increasing resistance from the Untouchables themselves. What was once a far more uniformly enforced pattern of inequality is now the focus of intense social tension and open, large scale conflict. The following analysis employs case studies [only one of which is reproduced here] to illustrate the dynamics of the Untouchable rights picture, while exploring variations in the key factors affecting change.

#### Gujarat: This Time, Golana.

Golana is a relatively minor incident as conflicts over Untouchable rights go. Five Untouchables were killed in January of 1985 when local Darbar Rajput landlords set out to reestablish dominance over Untouchable villagers. A number of factors had led to changes in the Untouchables' status and attitudes, but the immediate focus of conflict was their effective use of government programs established to promote the rights of Untouchables

and other low status citizens. The state's role was ambiguous, however. Three days before the attack the local state legislator — who is the son of the most influential Rajput landlord in the region, and also a member of the Congress (I) party that initiated many of the policies in contention — visited the village to urge the Untouchables to “compromise” by retreating from exercise of legal rights. The attack itself took place in daylight, began at the village bus stop, and involved an armed mob of more than 50 men, but an armed police contingent that had been posted in the village as the result of an earlier disturbance failed to intervene.

The village is an afternoon's bus ride south of the state's capital and key industrial city, Ahmedabad. The Darbar Rajputs who dominate the village were originally revenue collectors for the Moghul kings, then filled the same role for the British, then used their economic base to gain access to modern education and the new bureaucracy. Darbars now share dominance of the region's administration with the Patidars, another landed caste. In spite of recent land reforms, the Darbars, who are 20 percent of the village population, still control between 60 and 70 percent of the arable land, which is cultivated for them by tribal and low caste wage laborers and sharecroppers. In spite of slow changes in local labor relations, Darbars were still accustomed to a cheap and docile labor force and had only recently experienced serious threats to their dominance.

The largest Untouchable caste in the village, the Vankars, had traditionally been weavers. Gradually the people whose skills had attracted Western traders to Gujarat had been displaced by industry — first by mill cloth from imperial Britain, then by cloth from the mills of the indigenous Indian industrialists whose profits fueled the nationalist movement. Vankars throughout Gujarat became increasingly dependent on agricultural labor for local landed elites, though a few did find employment in semi-segregated departments of the new textile mills of Ahmedabad and Bombay, or worked as unskilled urban labor. The urban labor market expanded slowly, however, and urban working conditions were generally as exploitative and precarious as those in agriculture.

Policies to expand Untouchable rights in the Indian economy have also taken effect slowly, but they too have affected once secure high caste dominance. A three-cornered maneuver among the British, Gandhi's Indian National Congress, and the key Untouchable leader of the era, Dr. Ambedkar, produced an extensive set of incentives and affirmative action programs for education and public sector employment of Untouchables and tribals that have been expanded slowly by subsequent developments in Indian politics. These programs have been so hampered by the existing poverty of the target groups and the determined sabotage of higher caste

elites that we easily overlook their long-term impact. By the 1970s, there were several well educated Untouchable youths from Golana families. Some were employed as teachers, others were in government civil service jobs.

Gradually, these developments have eroded the Darbar's dominance. Now the pace of change is accelerating, for the new jobs give Untouchables independent access to information about the operation of other redistributive policies. Over the past few years, Golana Untouchable families have been awarded small quantities of land under the Tenancy Act, the Land Ceilings Act, and programs for distribution of house sites to previously landless villagers.

Cooperatives have been another source of informal Untouchable education and mobility in Golana. With the encouragement and advice of higher caste social activists and an Indian Christian agency in Ahmedabad, the Vankars set up their own cooperative. This unit linked Vankars from several surrounding villages, and united Hindu Vankars with the small number of Vankar Christian converts. The cooperative improved incomes by pooling lands received by individuals in grants from the government, and using part of this land to develop a sideline in charcoal production to provide paid employment during the agricultural slack season. This reduced Vankar dependence on Darbar loans during the slack season and thus increased Vankar ability to negotiate for good wages during peak farming seasons. Cooperative members also became increasingly willing to assert legal rights. They persisted in building homes on house sites assigned by the state, in spite of intense Darbar opposition, and three months before the fatal attack the cooperative commenced cultivating 40 acres that the Darbars had forcibly withheld ever since it was granted to Vankar families by the government in the mid-1970s.

The Darbar attack on January 25th was well organized. The Darbars first attempted to use one of the many caste distinctions within the Untouchable population; a few members of the local sweeper caste were egged into a quarrel in which they injured a Vankar youth. The Vankars merely prepared to take the boy to a hospital and to seek official intervention from the district headquarters town. As they boarded a passing truck the Darbars themselves attacked, then spread out through the village in a hunt for officials of the cooperative. The five Vankars killed were all leading figures in the cooperative movement; two were shot at point blank range, the others were beaten to death.

A few days later, Untouchable activists in Ahmedabad mobilized massive demonstrations. The mass media had paid scant attention to the massacre, but Untouchable organizations had collected and circulated their own information independently. The rallies carried a clear public message:

although policies promoting Untouchable rights might generate political headaches for the governments that had formalized those policies, political retreat would also have a price.

The Untouchables had good reason to feel the message was necessary. Since 1981 Gujarat has been racked by waves of anti-Untouchable violence, much of it organized on a state-wide basis by high caste urban university students and professionals trying to turn back the programs that encourage higher education and public sector employment for Untouchables and other severely disadvantaged groups in Gujarat's profoundly unequal society. A number of observers have argued that something much larger than specific affirmative action policies is at stake, that the agitations represent diffuse high caste fear of any low caste mobility and all that such mobility would represent for the potential collapse of a system of hierarchy and caste privilege. The analysts have gone on to point out that although Untouchables are a relatively small proportion of the state's affirmative action program, "Untouchable" bulks large in the popular imagination as the symbolic floor of the entire social hierarchy, and Untouchables thus become the special focus of resistance to more generalized change.

The nature of this potential change is clearer if we examine the state's current socio-economic arithmetic. The so-called "Forward Castes" that have so thoroughly dominated business, the professions, bureaucracy, and land holding — the Brahmans, Rajputs, Baniyas, and the landed Patel/Patidar complex — are actually an elite minority, 25 percent of the population. Pushed to the bottom of society have been the Untouchables and the tribals, 7 percent and 13 percent respectively. Between these two clearly defined poles are a wide array of Hindu castes and religious minority communities, some relatively independent and prosperous, but many so hobbled by linked high caste discrimination and economic exploitation that their condition often approximates the Untouchable and tribal experience. Slowly, haltingly, the pressures of democratic politics have built upon the Independence era policies of affirmative action for Untouchables and tribals, expanding the range of settings covered by the programs and also extending limited coverage to the communities now referred to as "Socially and Economically Backward Classes" (SEBC).

The resulting programs actually preserve the Forward Castes' prominence in society's prestige positions, but the threat to familiar, unquestioned monopoly has triggered panicky resistance. For example, the programs under attack in 1981 had set up university admission and government hiring targets of 25 to 30 percent for a variety of the most seriously disadvantaged groups, the exact proportion varying for different programs. The Forward Castes continued to be free to compete for the remaining 70

to 75 percent of the positions, plus all positions from the affirmative action pool unfilled "for lack of suitable candidates". In the five years prior to the 1981 riots, riots initiated by high caste medical school students, only 4 percent of the seats in the state's medical schools had gone to students from the affirmative action pool. Although the agitators wrapped their actions in the rhetoric of "defend the merit system", they did not challenge the common practice of reserving a significant number of slots for the children of "donor" families able to make substantial financial contributions to schools. Untouchables were the primary targets of violence — thousands were left homeless and 7 were murdered — but Untouchables were the smallest of the beneficiary categories that included tribals (13 percent) and SEBC (10 percent) as well as Untouchables (7 percent). Numerically, neither this nor subsequent waves of anti-Untouchable violence associated with the affirmative action programs made much sense. Symbolically, their meaning has been clear to everyone, including the politicians who are simultaneously actors and audience.

There has been no consistent pattern to political party support — or opposition — to the efforts to open avenues of mobility for the state's long-suppressed majority. Both a series of Congress governments and the one opposition party coalition that governed in the late 1970s have supported various extensions of the policies. At the same time, each outbreak of violent resistance has seen involvement by a variety of politicians from both opposition and ruling parties, though the politicians appear to play secondary roles. Throughout, the initiative has come from high caste students and professionals. The most serious outbreaks, in 1981 and 1985, came hard on the heels of overwhelming electoral victories for the governments subsequently challenged by the violence. Agitation and violence have become the weapons of recalcitrant elements of a small high caste elite that has been losing its ability to control electoral politics.

This strategy of agitation has brought occasional victories for the higher castes, but the political arena continues to be relatively open in Gujarat. For example, shortly after the Golana massacre, Untouchables and the small group of high caste social workers supporting them demanded the appointment of a Special Prosecutor, a move that would greatly increase the likelihood of effective prosecution and simultaneously signal state support for the still frightened Untouchable villagers. Prominent Vankar politicians, including the Congress Whip of the state legislature and a central government Cabinet member, were pressed into service. Golana's Rajputs responded by mobilizing the aid of caste-fellows in the Congress party and the bureaucracy in an effort to block prosecution, only to discover that the new Chief Minister was far more deeply beholden to Untouchables in his



party than to the Rajputs. A Special Prosecutor was appointed, a Rajput police official who had blocked collection of evidence was transferred, and the case was finally sent to trial under the draconic provisions of the Terrorism Act. It is common for even the most blatant attack on Untouchable rights to go unpunished, but in this case supporters hoped for convictions and stiff penal sentences.

Both the reservation wars and events like the Golana massacre illustrate some of the intense conflicting pressures that operate throughout Indian politics. The most common political solution to juggling the demands of a small elite and a massive underclass has been to combine some redistributive policies with administrative inaction that is either tolerated or explicitly encouraged. So pervasive is this practice that it has led one of India's leading legal scholars, Upendra Baxi, to describe it as a routinized system of "governmental lawlessness" in which government officials regularly violate the government's own laws. This "solution" is under increasing pressure, however. Long-term changes in society and economy, combined with even marginal effects from a generation of redistributive policies, have raised the level of pressure from the dispossessed themselves.

One important factor in this rising level of pressure from below has been the increasing Untouchable capacity for independent mobilizing. We have already seen glimpses of this development, on a local scale in Golana, and in the efforts of Untouchables in Ahmedabad to bring state pressure to bear on behalf of Golana villagers that most of the Ahmedabad activists had never met. In most areas of the country, including Gujarat, the ability to launch efforts like these is still so new that sometimes it seems to startle the Untouchables as much as the higher caste elite. However the change has been part of the slow and uneven build up of new attitudes and resources within the Untouchable population.

There is no one style, strategy, or philosophy that conveniently summarizes the new mobilizing efforts within the Untouchable community, but one of the organizations behind the initial Ahmedabad rallies protesting the Golana massacre, the Dalit Panthers, serves to illustrate several of the more common characteristics of the larger scale efforts.

The local Panther organization is part of a larger movement that began in the early 1970s among young Untouchables in working class districts of Bombay. The movement drew its inspiration from both the late Untouchable leader, Dr. Ambedkar, and news of America's Black revolution and Black Panthers. The original Dalit Panther organization soon broke into a number of different, and often competing, fragments, but at the same time the movement spread rapidly along the rail and highway lines that already carried increasing numbers of migrating Untouchable workers and students.

Several features of Panther ideology have remained influential constants during this process of diffusion. The Panther emphasis on assertive self-respect includes specific rejection of the inequalities of both class and caste, an outlook that sustains critically important links between the resources of the small new strata of educated Untouchables and the much larger block of Untouchable laborers. The concept of "Dalit" itself — "the oppressed" — is consciously inclusive of all forms of both cultural and economic oppression, and greatly expands the potential arena of both personal identity and group alliances. One recurrent Panther theme has been efforts to break down traditional social barriers between Untouchable castes, and between Untouchables and other oppressed groups.

Panther groups active in Gujarat do not regard themselves as a match for high caste organizations with far greater resources, but during the 1981 anti-reservation riots they succeeded in mobilizing the first strike since Independence in Ahmedabad's massive textile industry. Untouchables are a minority of the mill workers, but the patterns of discrimination that clustered them together in semi-segregated departments produced unexpected leverage. When Untouchable mill workers heeded the Panther call for a strike to protest the riots, production quickly ground to a halt. Private industrialists who had backed high caste students leading the agitation quickly saw the need for moderation, and the agitations that had run a bloody course for months rapidly subsided. Obviously this particular success was temporary, but local Panther units continue to be one channel through which support for a new vision of rights and identity change is mobilized within the Untouchable community.

### **Human Rights: A Postscript**

In May of 1990 the Government of India released its official figures on acts of violence committed against Scheduled Caste [Untouchable] citizens during 1989. These figures do not include the many cases that go unrecorded because of the victims' fears or because of collusion between local officials and the perpetrators of violence. Nevertheless, the figures are worthy of note. The official tally showed 14,269 cases of violence. These included 479 murders and 759 rapes. There were also 1,393 cases of grievous hurt, 611 cases of arson, and 11,027 other offences under the Indian Penal Code.

## 6. AMBEDKAR AND THE INTERNATIONAL BUDDHIST MOVEMENT

*The continuing influence of Dr. Ambedkar's life and work is by no means limited to India. Dr. Richard Hayes reminds us of one of the many ways in which Dr. Ambedkar has influenced the modern international community. Dr. Hayes is a scholar of Buddhism who serves on the Faculty of Religious Studies of McGill University in Montréal, Québec. In this article he also speaks from personal experience and dedication to the modern Buddhist movement.*

### Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and the Modern Buddhist Reform Movement

*Dr. Richard P. Hayes (1991)*

The one hundredth anniversary of the birth of Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar is an occasion for Buddhists to reflect on the nature of the new forms of Buddhism that are developing in the modern world, especially in Europe and Anglo-North America. The Western Buddhist movement is showing signs of being a reformation movement. As reformers, Western Buddhists owe it to themselves to look at the work of other reformers. And there has perhaps been no greater Buddhist reformer in the twentieth century than Dr. Ambedkar. In this tribute to Ambedkar, three questions will be addressed: 1) What is there to be reformed in Buddhism? 2) In what way was Ambedkar a Buddhist reformer? 3) What do Western Buddhists have to learn from Ambedkar?

#### What is there to be reformed in Buddhism?

The question of what there is to be reformed in Buddhism is a very old one, one that goes back to the years immediately following the the Buddha's Parinibbāna. In those very early days there were people who wished to initiate certain reforms. Although the passage of time has obscured what the exact proposals for reform were, the reaction of the Theravādin elders to those proposals has been recorded.

When the proposal was made that Buddhism be reformed, the Theravādins replied by asking what exactly the reformers would change. Would they change any one of the Four Noble Truths? Would they, for example, challenge the Buddha's observation that there is much discontent (*dukkha*)

in the world? Or would they challenge his insight that what causes so much of our discontent are selfish desires and the habit of seeing ourselves as being different from and more important than other living beings? Or would reformers suggest that there is no escaping our misery? Or would they deny that the best method of overcoming our own suffering is to develop the habit of thinking about the needs of others and acting to help others overcome their misery?

The Theravādin reaction to proposed reform makes a good deal of sense, and every would-be reformer ought to ponder it. For it serves as an important reminder of what the real essence of the Buddha Dharma is: the Four Noble Truths, and the life of careful and responsible action that follows from those truths. Every word that a teacher of the Dharma speaks, and every action that she or he performs, should be aimed at helping people to understand the importance of these Four Truths and to live by them.

Reform becomes necessary only at times when those who have taken upon themselves the duty of teaching the Dharma are no longer doing their duty well. At such times it may be necessary for Buddhists to remind themselves and their teachers of what is truly important and of what kinds of actions are best suited to help people understand the real nature of our misery and the best method of becoming content in a difficult world. A reformer, then, is nothing but a reminder, a person whose task is not to change anything in the Buddha's teaching but to help other people find their way back to those teachings.

#### In what way was Dr. Ambedkar a Buddhist reformer?

It is well known that B.R. Ambedkar was an intelligent and sharp critic of the kinds of injustice that were built into the Hindu caste system. But what is less well known is the fact that Ambedkar was also a critic of the social patterns and the practices that have become part of the institutions of Buddhism. While he held the example set by the Buddha in high esteem, he was much less enthusiastic about the ordained order of monks. It was not that Ambedkar felt that the monastic life necessarily contradicts the Buddha's teachings — after all, the Buddha himself had ordained the first monks. Rather, the high status and respect that monks had come to enjoy in traditional Buddhist societies had, in Ambedkar's opinion, tended to dull their sensitivity to the needs of the poor and the downtrodden.

The original monks, during the time of the Buddha, lived a simple life that was a constant reminder of the weakness and insecurity of all living things. The original monks were not members of a well-recognized and highly respected organization. On the contrary, they were often subject to mockery and ridicule. Few people in the time of the Buddha could have

predicted that one day his followers would be found throughout Asia, or that within a few centuries the Buddhist establishment would have great wealth, political power, and social privilege in many kingdoms and empires. In the early days, becoming a Buddhist monk required courage and sacrifice, whereas in later centuries it was seen by many as a means of improving their own personal social standing. And as so often happens in the world, when people enjoy privilege and social recognition, they forget the needs and frustrations of those who are powerless. Instead of becoming more humble and less attached to the worldly goals of fame and comfort, they become more arrogant and more attached to worldly pursuits.

On the basis of what he had seen of the Buddhist monks living in the twentieth century, Ambedkar concluded that genuine monks, the humble and simple women and men who had entered the solitary life at the time of the Buddha, had become scarce. Indeed, Ambedkar had reason to fear that the poor and powerless people of India would be scarcely better off as Buddhist lay people than they had been as Untouchables at the very bottom of the Hindu caste system. For as Buddhist laity, they might very well be burdened with the obligation of supporting the modern kind of monk.

Ambedkar was a man of great courage and powerful convictions, and he was not afraid to speak out against the dangers of personal and collective corruption that were to be found in the modern monastic Sangha. He was not afraid to remind the Buddhist monks of his day that their principal duty was to live a life of service to all other living beings, not to expect to be served and honoured by lay people. Ambedkar, like many other Buddhist reformers in the twentieth century, reminded Buddhist leaders that compassion for all living beings is not merely a slogan and need not be a remote ideal. Rather, it could be a leading principle governing the daily lives of men and women of all ages and all persuasions. Buddhists, he pointed out, had a great deal to learn from the examples of some Christians, especially those who saw religious life as a calling to help eliminate the social and economic roots of injustice and humiliation.

#### **What do Western Buddhists have to learn from Dr. Ambedkar?**

Sadly, the situation in the Buddhist world has improved very little since Ambedkar's time. Buddhism has indeed taken root again in its native Indian soil, and it has also been transplanted to European and North American soil. But whether one looks in India or in the countries dominated by European culture, one finds in general that ordained monks are not much less disappointing to our generation than they were to Ambedkar. Rather than helping people develop a simple and dignified life as an alternative to the materialistic values of European culture, many of the modern

Buddhists have themselves become less simple and more materialistic. Rather than following the examples of those European Christians who have dedicated their lives to fighting social and economic injustice, too many Buddhist leaders have followed the example of those Christians who are obsessed with building large churches, filling their large churches with large congregations, and funding the whole operation with large bank accounts. The begging bowl has been replaced by the fund-raising campaign. The Dharma talk has given way to the automated flood of unsolicited letters asking the faithful to help support their local temple.

We people of the last decade of the twentieth century can expect as little good leadership from our Buddhist teachers as Ambedkar could expect from the teachers of his day. And because we are, in that respect, in a situation very similar to his, we have a great deal to learn from his example. Rather than blindly following the religious authorities and the learned scholars and intellectuals of his day, Ambedkar took the Buddha's own advice. "Come and see!" said the Buddha. "Test the Dharma for yourself in your own life. Take no one else's word for it."

Although Ambedkar did read very widely in the vast literature of Buddhism, he came to recognize that the teachings of the Buddha are very simple and do not require reading widely. Being learned is not at all the same as being wise. The Dharma has nothing to do with being highly educated and skilled with words. It has to do with being gentle and full of love for others. Being a Buddhist requires nothing more — and nothing less — than learning to be gentle and kindhearted and as harmless as circumstances will reasonably allow. It is very helpful to have the friendship and encouragement of others, but it is not necessary to have ordained monks as spiritual guides, or large temples, or thousands of mysterious dogmas and magical spells. Such things only obscure the simplicity of thought and word and deed that is the central goal of Buddhism.

This need for simplicity is something that Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar understood very clearly. When he encouraged the former Untouchables of India to become Buddhists, he felt that the teachings of Buddhism offered more opportunity than the teachings of any other traditional religion to help a downtrodden people find a quiet and simple dignity that their social and economic circumstances had never before allowed them or their ancestors to enjoy. Most Europeans and North Americans who turn to Buddhism are anything but underprivileged and disadvantaged. But for them, as for their Indian brothers and sisters, the modern rediscovery of the dignified and altruistic simplicity of the Dharma as lived by the Buddha could very well be the most important discovery in their lifetimes. We all owe it to Dr. B.R. Ambedkar for helping make that rediscovery possible.

## 7. A Life in Pictures



Sri Ambedkar.  
B.G. Sharma, chromolithograph, c. 1960  
*Courtesy of Prof. Gary M. Tartikov*



Caste hierarchy and the oppression of "low" castes, as drawn by a Dalit artist.  
D. David  
*Courtesy of Prof. Barbara Joshi*



The home of a New Delhi sweeper, with her son in the foreground and the home of one of her employers in the background.  
*Courtesy of Prof. Barbara Joshi*



A statue of Dr. Ambedkar on Ajanta Road, just north of Aurangabad, c. 1960.

*Courtesy of Prof. Gary M. Tartikov*



A Dalit home destroyed by “high” caste violence, in the southern state of Andhra Pradesh.

E.V. Chinnaiah

*Courtesy of Prof. Barbara Joshi*



A Dalit woman in southern Indian sits amid the ruins of her home, destroyed by “high” caste Hindus.

E.V. Chinnaiah

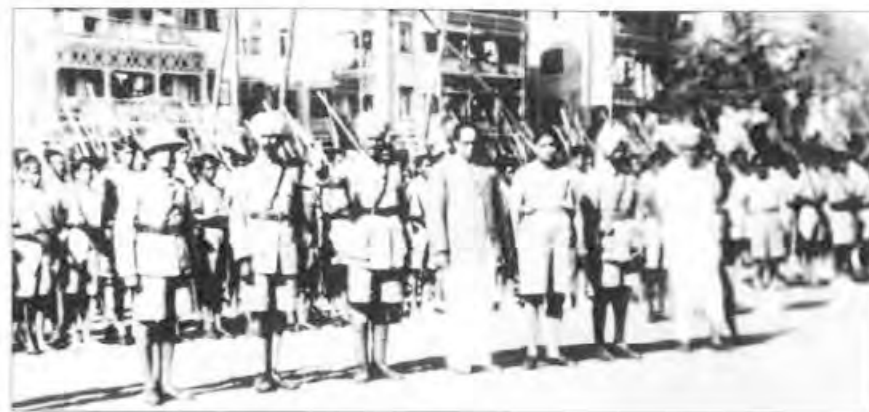
*Courtesy of Prof. Barbara Joshi*



Babasaheb and Ramabai Ambedkar.  
*Courtesy of the Ambedkar Centenary  
Celebration Committee UK*



Dr. Ambedkar in London, c. 1920.  
*Courtesy of the Ambedkar Centenary  
Celebration Committee UK*



Dr. Ambedkar reviews a Dalit service organization formed in western India to assist his campaigns for equality, c. 1927.  
*Courtesy of Prof. Barbara Joshi*



Dr. Ambedkar with other Dalit organizers of the 1930 Nasik Satyagraha, one of his efforts to gain Untouchable access to a Hindu temple. By 1935, Ambedkar had renounced Hindu reform as a solution to Untouchable problems.

Vijay Surwade, Bombay

*Courtesy of Prof. Barbara Joshi*



The first Round Table Conference, Nov. 16, 1930—Jan. 19, 1931. Ambedkar is sitting in the first row left.  
*Courtesy of the Ambedkar Centenary Celebration Committee UK*



The second Round Table Conference, which met in St. James' Palace, Sept. 1—Dec. 1, 1931. Ambedkar is sitting at the bottom right.  
*Courtesy of the Ambedkar Centenary Celebration Committee UK*



Dr. Ambedkar's swearing-in ceremony before Pandit Nehru as Law Minister of India, 1947.  
*Courtesy of the Ambedkar Centenary Celebration Committee UK*



Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Chairman, Constitutional Drafting Committee, presents a copy of the constitution to Dr. Rajendra Prasad, first president of the Indian Republic, 1950.  
*Courtesy of the Ambedkar Centenary Celebration Committee UK*



Dr. Ambedkar at the Kandy Buddhist Temple in Sri Lanka (then known as Ceylon) in 1950, attending the World Buddhist Conference.  
*Courtesy of Prof. Eleanor Zelliott*



Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar and Maisaheb at the time of conversion to Buddhism in Nagpur, 1956.  
Vaishali Arts, Ulhasnagar

*Courtesy of Prof. Eleanor Zelliott*



Dr. Ambedkar taking the Three Refuges and Five Vows of a Buddhist before Bhikku Chandramani, in Nagpur, on October 14, 1956.  
Vijay Surwade, Sudhedar Ramji Ambedkar Nagar  
*Courtesy of Prof. Eleanor Zelliott*





Dalit women in the city of Pune stage a silent march to protest atrocities against Dalits in the villages of western India.  
*Courtesy of Prof. Eleanor Zelliot*



Dalit women protest against the caste system. Their sign says: "Down With Caste!"  
*Courtesy of Prof. Barbara Joshi*



Great Stupa, Sanchi, first century CE (Christian Era).  
*Courtesy of Prof. Gary M. Tartikov*



Shanti Vihara (Temple of Peace), designed by W.M. Godbole, Shantivana, Nagpur.  
*Courtesy of Prof. Gary M. Tartikov*



Ambedkar Memorial Shrine, Sivaji Park, Dadar, Bombay.  
*Courtesy of Prof. Gary M. Tartikov*



Babasaheb Ambedkar Memorial Complex, Diksha Bhumi, Nagpur.  
Architect's model. Sheo Dan Mal, architect. Project begun 1982.  
*Courtesy of Prof. Gary M. Tartikov*



Statues of Dr. Ambedkar and Shakyamuni Buddha, at the entrance to the  
Tarodi Settlement, Nagpur.  
*Courtesy of Prof. Gary M. Tartikov*



Triratna Buddha Vihara (Three Jewels Buddhist Temple), a Dalit temple  
in Hanuman Nagar Government Colony, Bombay.  
*Courtesy of Prof. Gary M. Tartikov*

## SOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

The following materials are readily available to readers in North America who may wish to find further information.

The Ambedkar Mission is located in Toronto. In addition to its own occasional publications the Mission can assist in locating a wide range of materials from India. Ambedkar Mission Inc., 27 Marlana Drive, Scarborough, Ontario, M1E 2Y9, Canada.

Dr. Ambedkar's writings are now being republished in a series of volumes printed by the Government of Maharashtra under the series title *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*. A convenient way to purchase these books is through South Asia Books, P. O. Box 502, Columbia, Missouri 65205, USA.

The works of a variety of Dalit scholars, poets, and activists are represented in Barbara Joshi (ed.), *Untouchable! Voices From the Dalit Liberation Movement* (London: Zed Books, and the Minority Rights Group, 1986).

The Karuna Trust, a Buddhist service organization, has documented recent developments among Dalit Buddhists in western India in a video titled *The Peaceful Revolution*. For information contact Ginny Keegan, 29 Cove Road, Porter's Landing, Freeport, Maine 04032, tel. 207-865-1677.

The Minority Rights Group has surveyed the status of Untouchables in *The Untouchables of India*, Report #26, 1982. Contact Minority Rights Group, 379 Brixton Road, London, SW9 7DE.

Two books that describe the Dalit Buddhist movement are Sangharakshita, *Ambedkar and Buddhism* (Glasgow: Windhorse Publications, 1986), and Terry Pilchick, *Jai Bhim! Dispatches from a Peaceful Revolution* (Berkeley, CA.: Parallax Press, 1988).

The Western Buddhist Order has available a video entitled *In the Footsteps of Dr. Ambedkar*. Contact FWBO Centre, 110-1421 East 2nd Avenue, Vancouver, B.C. V5N 1C6, tel. 604-251-4316.

## DR. AMBEDKAR: A CHRONOLOGY

- 1891 Born 14th April at Mahu in Madhya Pradesh, fourteenth child of Subehdar Ramji and Bhimabai Ambedkar.
- 1912 Received B. A. degree in Economics and Politics from Elphinstone College, University of Bombay.
- 1917 Awarded Ph. D. by Columbia University, New York City. Appointed Military Secretary to Maharaja of Baroda.
- 1918 Appointed Professor of Political Economics, Sydenham College, Bombay. Presents evidence to Southborough Commission; urges broad right to vote.
- 1920 Starts one of first Untouchable publications, *Mook Nayak*.
- 1923 Awarded D. Sc. (Economics) by London University. Became Barrister at Law, Gray's Inn, London.
- 1927 Leads Chowdar Tank Satyagraha at Mahad. Starts a new weekly journal, *Bahishkrut Bharat*.
- 1928 Professor, Government Law College, Bombay. Member, Bombay Committee to the Simon Commission on Indian participation in government of British India.
- 1930 Becomes member of the London Round Table Conference on transfer of self-government to India.
- 1932 Poona Pact. Member of joint Parliamentary Committee on Indian Constitutional Reform.
- 1936 Established the Independent Labour Party.
- 1939 Elected to legislature of Bombay Province.
- 1942 Appointed Labour Member, Viceroy's Executive Council. Establishes All India Scheduled Castes Federation to represent Untouchable interests.
- 1945 Establishes People's Education Society, Bombay.
- 1946 Establishes Siddharth College, Bombay.
- 1947 Elected member of India's Constituent Assembly. Appointed Law Minister in first Central Cabinet of independent India.
- 1950 Establishes Milind College, Aurangabad. Representative at World Buddhist Conference, Colombo.
- 1952 Member of Rajya Sabha (national legislature).
- 1955 Formed The Buddhist Society of India.
- 1956 Conversion to Buddhism, together with 500,000 supporters. Mahaparinirvan, 6th December.

